

PART THREE OF

a treatise by

JOHN BUNYAN

entitled

PRAYER

**I WILL PRAY WITH THE SPIRIT
AND WITH UNDERSTANDING ALSO**

or,

**A DISCOURSE TOUCHING PRAYER;
WHEREIN IS DISCOVERED, SPIRITUALLY
ENLIGHTENED TO SEE THE PROMISES
AND TO BE ENCOURAGED**

*“I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the
understanding also...”*

—1 Corinthians 14:15

Introduction and Treatise Compiled & Edited by
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This treatise was written in 1662 and published in 1663, while John Bunyan was in prison. Our reading of this work, as well as the editor's advertisement, come from a three volume collection edited by George Offor, Esq., and entitled, *The Whole Works of John Bunyan*. George Offor's edition of Bunyan's works was published in Glasgow in 1862.



John Bunyan was born in Elstow, England, near Bedford, on November 28, 1628. After squandering much of his life away in worldly wantonness, Bunyan was converted to the Christian faith and soon afterward, became an excellent expositor of the Holy Scriptures. He was imprisoned in November 1660 for the crime of preaching without a license from the state church. He remained incarcerated for twelve years, with only a few, and brief occasions of liberty. Though he may have began writing his famous *The Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison, Bunyan finished the work a few years after his release in 1672. *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published in 1678. Bunyan also wrote many other excellent works such as *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, *Some Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures*, *A Vindication of Some Gospel Truths Opened* and *The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate Clearly Explained and Largely Improved For the Benefit of All Believers*. A contemporary with such men as John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and Richard Baxter, John Bunyan is recognized as possibly one of the greatest of the Puritan writers. Bunyan died on August 31, 1688, after taking ill from traveling through inclement weather. He was buried at Bunhill Fields.

George Offor's "Advertisement By the Editor" is not in our audio reading of Mr. Bunyan's treatise on Prayer. It is, however, very worth the time to read. You will find it with Part One of this treatise.

I have also included some footnotes that I thought might be helpful. Still, my desire is to use the footnotes very sparingly, so as not to disturb the flow of this work.

PRAYER

I WILL PRAY WITH THE SPIRIT AND WITH UNDERSTANDING ALSO (PART TWO)

"I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also"
—1 Corinthians 14:15

WHAT IT IS TO PRAY WITH THE SPIRIT, AND WITH THE UNDERSTANDING

THIRD. And now to the next thing, what it is to pray with the Spirit, and to pray with the understanding also. For the apostle puts a clear distinction between praying with the Spirit, and praying with the Spirit and understanding: therefore when he saith, "he will pray with the Spirit," he adds, "and I will pray with the understanding ALSO." This distinction was occasioned through the Corinthians not observing that it was their duty to do what they did to the edification of themselves and others too: whereas they did it for their own commendations. So I judge: for many of them having extraordinary gifts, as to speak with divers tongues, &c., therefore they were more for those mighty gifts than they were for the edifying of their brethren; which was the cause that Paul wrote this chapter to them, to let them understand, that though extraordinary gifts were excellent, yet to do what they did to the edification of the church was more excellent. For, saith the apostle, "if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding," and also the understanding of others, "is unfruitful" (1 Corinthians 14:3, 4, 12, 19, 24, 25. Read the scope of the whole chapter). Therefore, "I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also."

It is expedient then that the understanding should be occupied in prayer, as well as the heart and mouth: "I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also." That which is done with understanding, is done more effectually, sensibly, and heartily, as I shall show farther anon, than that which is done without it; which made the apostle pray for the Colossians, that God would fill them "with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9). And for the Ephesians, that God would give unto them "the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of him" (Ephesians 1:17). And so for the Philippians, that God would make them abound "in knowledge, and in all judgment" (Philippians 1:9). A suitable understanding is good in everything a man undertakes, either civil or spiritual; and therefore it must be desired by all them that would be a praying people. In my speaking to this, I shall show you what it is to pray with understanding.

Understanding is to be taken both for speaking in our mother-tongue, and also experimentally. I pass the first, and treat only on the second.

For the making of right prayers, it is to be required that there should be a good or spiritual understanding in all them who pray to God.

First. To pray with understanding, is to pray as being instructed by the Spirit in the understanding of the want of those things which the soul is to pray for. Though a man be in never so much need of pardon of sin, and deliverance from wrath to come, yet if he understand not this, he will either not desire them at all, or else be so cold and lukewarm in his desires after them, that God will even loathe his frame of spirit in asking for them. Thus it was with the church of the Laodiceans, they wanted knowledge or spiritual understanding; they knew not that they were poor, wretched, blind, and naked. The cause whereof made them, and all their services, so loathsome to Christ, that he threatens to spew them out of his mouth (Revelation 3:16-17). Men without understanding may say the same words in prayer as others do; but if there be an understanding in the one, and none in the other, there is, O there is a mighty difference in speaking the very same words! The one speaking from a spiritual understanding of those things that he in words desires, and the other words it only, and there is all.

Second. Spiritual understanding espieth in the heart of God a readiness and willingness to give those things to the soul that it stands in need of. David by this could guess at the very thoughts of God towards him (Psalm 40:5). And thus it was with the woman of Canaan; she did by faith and a right understanding discern, beyond all the rough carriage of Christ, tenderness and willingness in his heart to save, which caused her to be vehement and earnest, yea, restless, until she did enjoy the mercy she stood in need of (Matthew 15:22-28).

And understanding of the willingness that is in the heart of God to save sinners, there is nothing will press the soul more to seek after God, and to cry for pardon, than it. If a man should see a pearl worth an hundred pounds lie in a ditch, yet if he understood not the value of it, he would lightly pass it by: but if he once get the knowledge of it, he would venture up to the neck for it. So it is with souls concerning the things of God: if a man once get an understanding of the worth of them, then his heart, nay, the very strength of his soul, runs after them, and he will never leave crying till he have them. The two blind men in the gospel, because they did certainly know that Jesus, who was going by them, was both able and willing to heal such infirmities as they were afflicted with: therefore they cried, and the more they were rebuked, the more they cried (Matthew 20:29-31).

Third. The understanding being spiritually enlightened, hereby there is the way, as aforesaid, discovered, through which the soul should come unto God; which gives great encouragement unto it. It is else with a poor soul, as with one who hath a work to do, and if it be not done, the danger is great; if it be done, so is the advantage. But he knows not how to begin, nor how to proceed; and so, through discouragement, lets all alone, and runs the hazard.

Fourth. The enlightened understanding sees largeness enough in the promises to encourage it to pray; which still adds to it strength to strength. As when men promise such and such things to all that will come for them, it is great encouragement to those that know what promises are made, to come and ask for them.

Fifth. The understanding being enlightened, way is made for the soul to come to God with suitable arguments, sometimes in a way of expostulation, as Jacob (Genesis 32:9). Sometimes in way of supplication, yet not in a verbal way only, but even from the heart there is forced by the Spirit, through the understanding, such effectual arguments as moveth the heart of God. When Ephraim gets a right understanding of his own unseemly carriages towards the Lord, then he begins to bemoan himself (Jeremiah 31:18-20). And in bemoaning of himself, he used such arguments with the Lord, that it affects his heart, draws out forgiveness, and makes Ephraim pleasant in his eyes through Jesus Christ our Lord: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus," saith God, "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised; as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented, and after that I was instructed," or had a right understanding of myself, "I smote upon my thigh, I was ashamed; yea, even confounded; because I did bear the reproach of my youth." These be Ephraim's complaints and bemoanings of himself; at which the Lord breaks forth into these heart-melting expressions, saying, "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Thus, you see, that as it is required to pray with the Spirit, so it is to pray with the understanding also. And to

illustrate what hath been spoken by a similitude:—set the case, there should come two a-begging to your door; the one is a poor, lame, wounded, and almost starved creature, the other is a healthful lusty person; these two use the same words in their begging; the one saith he is almost starved, so doth the other: but yet the man that is indeed the poor, lame, or maimed person, he speaks with more sense, feeling, and understanding of the misery that is mentioned in their begging, than the other can do; and it is discovered more by his affectionate speaking, his bemoaning himself. His pain and poverty make him speak more in a spirit of lamentation than the other, and he shall be pitied sooner than the other, by all those that have the least dram of natural affection or pity. Just thus it is with God: there are some who out of custom and formality go and pray; there are others who go in the bitterness of their spirits: the one he prays out of bare notion and naked knowledge; the other hath his words forced from him by the anguish of his soul. Surely that is the man that God will look at, “even to him that is poor,” of an humble “and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isaiah 66:2).

Sixth. An understanding well enlightened is of admirable use also, both as to the matter and manner of prayer. He that hath his understanding well exercised, to discern between good and evil, and in it placed a sense either of the misery of man, or the mercy of God; that soul hath no need of the writings of other men to teach him by forms of prayer. For as he that feels the pain needs not to be taught to cry. O! even so he that hath his understanding opened by the Spirit needs not so to be taught of other men’s prayers, as that he cannot pray without them. The present sense, feeling, and pressure that lieth upon his spirit, provokes him to groan out his request unto the Lord. When David had the pains of hell catching hold on him, and the sorrows of hell compassing him about, he needs not a bishop in a surplice to teach him to say, “O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul” (Psalm 116:3-4). Or to look into a book, to teach him in a form to pour out his heart before God. It is the nature of the heart of sick men, in their pain and sickness, to vent itself for ease, by dolorous groans and complainings to them that stand by. Thus it was with David, in Psalm 38:1-12. And thus, blessed be the Lord, it is with them that are endued with the grace of God.

Seventh. It is necessary that there be an enlightened understanding, to the end that the soul be kept in a continuation of the duty of prayer.

The people of God are not ignorant how many wiles, tricks, and temptations the devil hath to make a poor soul, who is truly willing to have the Lord Jesus Christ, and that upon Christ’s terms too; I say, to tempt that soul to be weary of seeking the face of God, and to think that God is not willing to have mercy on such a one as him. Ay, saith Satan, thou mayest pray indeed, but thou shalt not prevail. Thou seest thine heart is hard, cold, dull, and dread; thou dost not pray with the Spirit, thou dost not pray in good earnest, thy thoughts are running after other things, when thou pretendest to pray to God. Away hypocrite, go no further, it is but in vain to strive any longer! Here now, if the soul be not well informed in its understanding, it will presently cry out, “the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me” (Isaiah 49:14). Whereas the soul rightly informed and enlightened saith, Well, I will seek the Lord, and wait; I will not leave off, though the Lord keep silence, and speak not one word of comfort (Isaiah 40:27). He loved Jacob dearly, and yet he made him wrestle before he had the blessing (Genesis 32:25-27). Seeming delays in God are no tokens of his displeasure; he may hide his face from his dearest saints (Isaiah 8:17). He loves to keep his people praying, and to find them ever knocking at the gate of heaven; it may be, says the soul, the Lord

tries me, or he loves to hear me groan out my condition before him.

The woman of Canaan would not take seeming denials for real ones; she knew the Lord was gracious, and the Lord will avenge his people, though he bear long with them (Luke 18:1-6). The Lord hath waited longer upon me than I have waited upon him; and thus it was with David, "I waited patiently," saith he; that is, it was long before the Lord answered me, though at the last "he inclined" his ear "unto me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1). And the most excellent remedy for this is, an understanding well informed and enlightened. Alas, how many poor souls are there in the world, that truly fear the Lord, who, because they are not well informed in their understanding, are oft ready to give up all for lost, upon almost every trick and temptation of Satan! The Lord pity them, and help them to "pray with the Spirit, and with the understanding also." Much of mine own experience could I here discover; when I have been in my fits of agony of spirit, I have been strongly persuaded to leave off, and to seek the Lord no longer; but being made to understand what great sinners the Lord hath had mercy upon, and how large his promises were still to sinners; and that it was not the whole, but the sick, not the righteous, but the sinner, not the full, but the empty, that he extended his grace and mercy unto. This made me, through the assistance of his Holy Spirit, to cleave to him, to hang upon him, and yet to cry, though for the present he made no answer; and the Lord help all his poor, tempted, and afflicted people to do the like, and to continue, though it be long, according to the saying of the prophet (Habakkuk 2:3). And to help them (to that end) to pray, not by the inventions of men, and their stinted forms, but "with the Spirit, and with the understanding also."

Queries and Objections answered.

And now to answer a query or two, and so to pass on to the next thing.

Query First. But what would you have us poor creatures to do that cannot tell how to pray? The Lord knows I know not either how to pray, or what to pray for.

Answer. Poor heart! thou canst not, thou complainest, pray. Canst thou see thy misery? Hath God showed thee that thou art by nature under the curse of his law? If so, do not mistake, I know thou dost groan and that most bitterly. I am persuaded thou canst scarcely be found doing any thing in thy calling, but prayer breaketh from thy heart. Have not thy groans gone up to heaven from every corner of thy house? (Romans 8:26). I know it is thus; and so also doth thine own sorrowful heart witness thy tears, thy forgetfulness of thy calling, &c. Is not thy heart so full of desires after the things of another world, that many times thou dost even forget the things of this world? Prithee read this scripture, Job 23:12.

Query Second. Yea, but when I go into secret, and intend to pour out my soul before God, I can scarce say anything at all.

Answer. 1. Ah! Sweet soul! It is not thy words that God so much regards, as that he will not mind thee, except thou comest before him with some eloquent oration. His eye is on the brokenness of thine heart; and that it is that makes the very bowels of the Lord to run over. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

2. The stopping of thy words may arise from overmuch trouble in thy heart. David was so troubled sometimes, that he could not speak (Psalm 77:3-4). But this may comfort all such sorrowful hearts as thou art, that though thou canst not through the anguish of thy spirit speak much, yet the Holy Spirit stirs up in thine heart groans and

sighs, so much the more vehement: when the mouth is hindered, yet the spirit is not. Moses, as aforesaid, made heaven ring again with his prayers, when (that we read of) not one word came out of his mouth (Exodus 14:15). But,

3. If thou wouldst more fully express thyself before the Lord, study, first, Thy filthy estate; secondly, God's promises; thirdly, The heart of Christ. Which thou mayest know or discern,

(1.) By his condescension and bloodshed.

(2.) By the mercy he hath extended to great sinners formerly, and plead thine own vileness, by way of bemoaning; Christ's blood by way of expostulation; and in thy prayers, let the mercy that he hath extended to other great sinners, together with his rich promises of grace, be much upon thy heart. Yet let me counsel thee,

(a.) Take heed that thou content not thyself with words.

(b.) That thou do not think that God looks only at them neither. But,

(c.) However, whether thy words be few or many, let thine heart go with them; and then shalt thou seek him, and find him, when thou shalt seek him with thy whole heart (Jeremiah 29:13).

Objection. But though you have seemed to speak against any other way of praying but by the Spirit, yet here you yourself can give direction how to pray.

Answer. We ought to prompt one another forward to prayer, though we ought not to make for each other forms of prayer. To exhort to pray with Christian direction is one thing, and to make stunted forms for the tying up the Spirit of God to them is another thing. The apostle gives them no form to pray withal, yet directs to prayer (Romans 15:30-32; Ephesians 6:18). Let no man therefore conclude, that because we may with allowance give instructions and directions to pray, that therefore it is lawful to make for each other forms of prayer.

Objection. But if we do not use forms of prayer, how shall we teach our children to pray?

Answer. My judgment is, that men go the wrong way to teach their children to pray, in going about so soon to teach them any set company of words, as is the common use of poor creatures to do.

For to me it seems to be a better way for people betimes to tell their children what cursed creatures they are, and how they are under the wrath of God by reason of original and actual sin; also to tell them the nature of God's wrath, and the duration of the misery; which if they conscientiously do, they would sooner teach their children to pray than they do. The way that men learn to pray, it is by conviction for sin; and this is the way to make our sweet babes do so too. But the other way, namely, to be busy in teaching children forms of prayer, before they know any thing else, it is the next way to make them cursed hypocrites, and to puff them up with pride. Teach therefore your children to know their wretched state and condition; tell them of hell-fire and their sins, of damnation, and salvation; the way to escape the one, and to enjoy the other, if you know it yourselves, and this will make tears run down your sweet babes' eyes, and hearty groans flow from their hearts; and then also you may tell them to whom they should pray, and through whom they should pray: you may tell them also of God's promises, and his former grace extended to sinners, according to the word.

Ah! Poor sweet babes, the Lord open their eyes, and make them holy Christians. Saith David, "Come ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Psalm 34:11). He doth not say, I will muzzle you up in a form of prayer; but "I will

teach you the fear of the Lord”; which is, to see their sad states by nature, and to be instructed in the truth of the gospel, which doth through the Spirit beget prayer in every one that in truth learns it. And the more you teach them this, the more will their hearts run out to God in prayer. God never did account Paul a praying man, until he was a convinced and converted man; no more will it be with any else (Acts 9:11).

Objection. But we find that the disciples desired that Christ would teach them to pray, as John also taught his disciples; and that thereupon he taught them that form called the LORD’S PRAYER.

Answer. 1. To be taught by Christ, is that which not only they, but we desire; and seeing he is not here in his person to teach us, the Lord teach us by his Word and Spirit; for the Spirit it is which he hath said he would send to supply in his room when he went away, as it is (John 14:16; 16:7).

2. As to that called a form, I cannot think that Christ intended it as a stinted form of prayer.

(1.) Because he himself layeth it down diversely, as is to be seen, if you compare Matthew 6 and Luke 11. Whereas if he intended it as a set form, it must not have been so laid down, for a set form is so many words and no more.

(2.) We do not find that the apostles did ever observe it as such; neither did they admonish others so to do. Search all their epistles, yet surely they, both for knowledge to discern and faithfulness to practice, were as eminent as any HE ever since in the world which would impose it.

(3.) But, in a word, Christ by those words, “Our Father,” &c., doth instruct his people what rules they should observe in their prayers to God.

(1.) That they should pray in faith.

(2.) To God in the heavens.

(3.) For such things as are according to his will, &c. Pray thus, or after this manner.

Objection. But Christ bids pray for the Spirit; this implieth that men without the Spirit may notwithstanding pray and be heard (See Luke 11:9-13).

Answer. The speech of Christ there is directed to his own (Luke 11:1). Christ’s telling of them that God would give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him, is to be understood of giving more of the Holy Spirit; for still they are the disciples spoken to, which had a measure of the Spirit already; for he saith, “when ye pray, say, Our Father,” (Luke 11:2) I say unto you (Luke 11:8). And I say unto you (Luke 11:9), “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him,” (Luke 11:13). Christians ought to pray for the Spirit, that is, for more of it, though God hath endued them with it already.

Question. Then would you have none pray but those that know they are the disciples of Christ?

Answer. Yes.

1. Let every soul that would be saved pour out itself to God, though it cannot through temptation conclude itself a child of God. And,

2. I know if the grace of God be in thee, it will be as natural to thee to groan out thy condition, as it is for a sucking child to cry for the breast. Prayer is one of the first things that discovers a man to be a Christian (Acts 9:12). But yet if it be right, it is such prayer as followeth.

(1.) To desire God in Christ, for himself, for his holiness, love, wisdom, and glory. For right prayer, as it runs only to God through Christ, so it centers in him, and in him

alone. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire," long for, or seek after, "beside thee" (Psalm 73:25).

(2.) That the soul might enjoy continually communion with him, both here and hereafter. "I shall be satisfied, when I awake with" thine image, or in "thy likeness," (Psalm 17:15). "For in this we groan earnestly," &c., (2 Corinthians 5:2).

(3.) Right prayer is accompanied with a continual labour after that which is prayed for. "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning" (Psalm 130:6). "I will rise now, I will seek him whom my soul loveth" (Song of Songs 3:2). For mark, I beseech you, there are two things that provoke to prayer. The one is a detestation to sin, and the things of this life; the other is a longing desire after communion with God, in a holy and undefiled state and inheritance. Compare but this one thing with most of the prayers that are made by men, and you shall find them but mock prayers, and the breathings of an abominable spirit; for even the most of men either do pray at all, or else only endeavour to mock God and the world by so doing; for do but compare their prayer and the course of their lives together, and you may easily see that the thing included in their prayer is the least looked after by their lives. O sad hypocrites!

Thus have I briefly showed you, **FIRST**, What prayer is; **SECOND**, What it is to pray with the Spirit; **THIRD**, What it is to pray with the Spirit, and with the understanding also.