



## Matthew Henry on A Practical Method of daily Prayer

*I love prayer. It is that which buckles on all the Christian's armour.*

Matthew Henry

Few Bible commentators are better known than Matthew Henry (1662-1714). The *Commentary on the Whole Bible* that bears Henry's name continues to be reprinted, although Henry himself died after finishing Genesis through Acts, and the remainder was written by his friends drawing on his notes. The great evangelist George Whitefield (1714-1770) repeatedly read through Henry's commentary during his devotions and found it rich food for his soul. For all the fame of his commentaries, few people know that Henry also wrote a book on prayer that has been a bestseller for a century and a half.<sup>1</sup> And though his commentaries are read today around the world, few people know much about Henry's life.

Matthew Henry was an English Puritan born in 1662, 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, 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 twenty-four to fifty, Henry served as pastor of a church in Chester, having been privately ordained by Presbyterian ministers such as Richard Steele (1672-1729). The church began in private homes but over time grew to 350 communicant members, with many more adherents. Henry spent eight hours a day in study, sometimes rising at four o'clock in the morning. 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 three children from his second wife died in infancy.

Henry began writing his Bible commentary at age forty-two, 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 completing his commentary on the New Testament to thirteen of his ministerial friends.<sup>2</sup>

In 1710, Henry published *A Method for Prayer with Scripture Expressions Proper to Be Used under Each Head*.<sup>3</sup> In 1712, he preached sermons that were published as *Directions for Daily Communion with God*.<sup>4</sup> Those books reveal Henry's passion for biblical spirituality, for it must have been difficult for a busy pastor and author of a massive Bible commentary to find time to write about prayer as well. We will consider Henry's directions on prayer from his second book, then move on to his method of praying the Scriptures.

### **Directions for Praying All Day**

Henry wrote in his diary, "*I love prayer. It is that which buckles on all the Christian's armour.*"<sup>5</sup> 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 their solitudes, so that they are never less alone than when alone. Do we need better society than fellowship with the Father?*"

2. *"a counsellor ready in all their doubts,... a guide (Ps. 73:24), who has promised 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**" (Isa. 33:2).*
8. *"salvation insured by a sweet and undeceiving ear-nest ... If he thus guides us by his counsel he will receive us to glory."<sup>6</sup>*

Since God has made Himself available to us so fully, we should go to Him 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 doth not think that enough, but 'seven times a day will I praise thee, Ps. 119:164.'"*<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, Henry wrote three discourses of directions for prayer: beginning the day with God, spending the day with God, and closing the day with God.

### ***Directive One: 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."* Much of his discourse is devoted to motivating us to pray. 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 our Father through Christ the Mediator according to God's will as revealed in the Bible, then we can know that He has heard us and will answer according to His kindness.<sup>8</sup> 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 to his Master? Shall a dependent not talk to his Provider? Shall one in danger not converse with his Defender?<sup>9</sup>

Let no obstacle hinder you from coming to God. Though God is in heaven, He will hear your cries, even from the depths (Ps. 130:1). Though God be fearsome, He grants believers the Spirit of adoption to have freedom to speak with Him (Rom. 8:15). Yes, God already knows what you need, but He requires your prayers for His glory and to fit 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.<sup>10</sup>

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 in 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 (Hos. 7:14).<sup>11</sup> In light of the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer, Henry wrote:

*Let not self, carnal self, be the spring and centre 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 design in all your desires, that God may be glorified, and by this let them all be directed, determined, sanctified, and, when need is, overruled.*<sup>12</sup>

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 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 speed, and will make our service acceptable.”*<sup>13</sup>

David testified in Psalm 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 (Ex. 29:39; 30:7), and singers thanked the Lord every morning (1 Chron. 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 (Rev. 1:11), requires our firstfruits; 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.<sup>14</sup> Henry wrote, *“In the morning we are most free from company and business, and ordinarily have the best opportunity for solitude.”*<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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, dark, stormy days for God to answer their prayers. But they wait in hope.<sup>17</sup> Henry quoted Anglican priest and poet George Herbert (1593-1633):

*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.*<sup>18</sup>

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 on 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 the One 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 towards his Father whom he trusts and on whom he casts all his cares. A life of devotedness is that of a servant towards 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.”*<sup>19</sup> Henry thus argued that to pray without ceasing is a disposition of the heart 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. 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? In your business do you know that God assigned you this *“calling and employment”* and requires 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.<sup>20</sup> Henry's writings show us that every minute of every day contains ample reasons 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."*<sup>21</sup>

In addition, Henry calls 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.<sup>22</sup> 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 (make diligent efforts) with them, and will likewise make you patient and gentle towards them."*<sup>23</sup>

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 in 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.<sup>24</sup>

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 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 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 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,"* said Henry.<sup>25</sup>

Wherever you go, whatever you do each day, search for abundant reasons for prayer and praise, Henry said. 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***

David declared, *"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 reposeth itself with a perfect complacency; in him it is at home, it is at rest."*<sup>26</sup>

Henry advised us to lie down with thanksgiving to God when we go to bed at night. We should review His mercies and deliverances at the end of each day.

*“Every bite we eat, and every drop we drink, is mercy; every step we take, and every breath we draw, mercy.”*

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.<sup>27</sup>

Bedtime also offers an opportunity to reflect upon both our mortality and our 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.

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 continually 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 upon the intercession of Christ to grant us peace with God and forgiving our fellow men all their offenses against us, so that our hearts may be at peace with God and man.<sup>29</sup>

Henry suggested we might 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 long, may not break off the thread of my communion with God, but that as soon as I awake I may resume it!<sup>30</sup>*

So it was that Henry directed the Christian 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 the access to God granted to us in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:18 says, *“For through him (Christ Jesus) 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 ... 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,”* Henry said.<sup>31</sup>

*“This life of communion with God, and constant attendance upon him, is a heaven upon earth.”<sup>32</sup>*

## **A Method for Praying the Scriptures**

When a Christian devotes himself to prayer, whether privately or publicly, his prayers should be many because his burdens, concerns, needs, desires, and sins are many, and God’s mercies are great, Henry said. This commends the use of some method in prayer. To be sure, there are times when a Christian’s heart is so lifted up in prayer that a method is a hindrance. But those times are rare; ordinarily our prayers require 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, such as those found in the Lord’s Prayer, rather than a rambling stream of consciousness (or semi-consciousness) in which you forget what you are saying before your prayer is ended.

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.<sup>33</sup>

He said, *“Hear (God) speaking to you, and have an eye to that in everything you say to him; as when you write an answer to a letter of business, you lay it before you. God’s word must be the guide of your desires and the ground of your expectations in prayer.”*<sup>34</sup>

At the heart of Henry’s method is praying in the words of Scripture – that is, praying God’s Word back to God. O. Palmer Robertson wrote that *“prayer in this form is nothing more and nothing less than what the old Puritans called ‘pleading the promises.’ God has made promises to his people. His people respond by redirecting those promises to the Lord in the form of prayer.”*<sup>35</sup> Henry did not restrict himself entirely to Bible promises, however.

Ligon Duncan notes of Henry, *“He ransacks the Scriptures for references to God’s attributes and turns them into matters of adoration.”*<sup>36</sup>

In every respect, Henry sought to fill the mouth 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.”*<sup>37</sup>

Henry’s method included adoration, confession, petition for ourselves, thanksgiving, intercession for others, and a conclusion. This pattern generally follows the Westminster Directory for Public Worship (1645).<sup>38</sup> In each section, Henry briefly introduced the focus and gave an outline of its parts. Each point of the outline includes Scripture after Scripture woven together as possible expressions of prayer. Henry guarded readers against merely reading these prayers aloud without meditation, saying,

*“After all, the intention and close application of the mind, the lively exercises of faith and love, and the outgoings of holy desire toward God, are so essentially necessary to prayer, that without these in sincerity, the best and most proper language is but a lifeless image (i.e., a dead idol).”*<sup>39</sup>

Henry clearly believed that our prayers should be expressed in words and phrases from the Bible that have penetrated our hearts.

Let us consider a small sample of Henry’s method. He was first concerned that we pray in the fear of the Lord, saying,

*“In every prayer remember you are speaking to God, and make it to appear you have an awe of him upon your spirits. Let us not be ‘rash with our mouth; and let not our heart be hasty to utter anything before God;’ but let every word be well weighed, because ‘God is in heaven, and we upon earth,’ Eccl. 5:2.”*<sup>40</sup>

Henry introduced the reader to the adoration of God:

*Our spirits being composed into a very reverent serious frame, our thoughts gathered in, and all that is within us charged, in the name of the great God, carefully to attend the solemn and awful (awe-inspiring) service that lies before us, and to keep close to it; we must with a fixed intention and application of mind, and an active lively faith – set the Lord before us, see his eye upon us, and set ourselves in his special presence; presenting ourselves to him as living sacrifices, which we desire may be holy and acceptable, and a reasonable service; and then bind those sacrifices with cords to the horns of the altar, with such thoughts as these...*

*Let us now with humble boldness enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, in the new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil.”*<sup>41</sup>

Henry then offered page after page of suggested prayers of adoration in scriptural language, arranged by topics. It is a study of the biblical doctrine of God turned into prayer. To appreciate the fullness of Henry's method, consider his outline of biblical materials to direct our adoration:

1. Address the Infinitely Great and Glorious Being
  - a) With Holy Awe and Reverence
  - b) Distinguishing Him from False Gods
2. Reverently Adore God as Transcendently Bright and Blessed
  - a) The Self-Existent, Self-Sufficient, Infinite Spirit
  - b) His Existence Indisputable
  - c) His Nature Beyond Our Comprehension
  - d) His Perfection Matchless
  - e) Infinitely Above Us and All Others

*In particular, adore the Lord as:*

- 1) Eternal, Immutable
  - 2) Present in All Places
  - 3) Perfect in His Knowledge of All
  - 4) Unsearchable in Wisdom
  - 5) Sovereign, Owner, and Lord of All
  - 6) Irresistible in Power
  - 7) Unspotted in Purity and Righteousness
  - 8) Always Just in His Government
  - 9) Always True, Inexhaustibly Good
  - 10) Infinitely Greater Than Our Best Praises
3. Give God the Praise of His Glory in Heaven
4. Give Him Glory as Our Creator, Protector, Benefactor, and Ruler
5. Give Honor to the Three Distinct Persons of the Godhead
6. Acknowledge Our Dependence on Him and Obligation to Our Creator
7. Declare God to Be Our Covenant God Who Owns Us
8. Acknowledge the Inestimable Favor of Being Invited to Draw Near to Him
9. Express Our Unworthiness to Draw Near to God
10. Profess Our Desire for Him as Our Happiness
11. Profess Our Hope and Trust in His All-Sufficiency
12. Ask God to Graciously Accept Us and Our Poor Prayers
13. Pray for the Assistance of the Holy Spirit in Our Prayers
14. Make the Glory of God as the Highest Goal of Our Prayers
15. Profess Our Reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ Alone.<sup>42</sup>

Each point of the outline includes several prayers drawn from the Scriptures. For example, one prayer under the topic of God's matchless perfection is,

*"Who is a God like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"<sup>43</sup>*

In the section on professing hope in God's sufficiency, Henry wrote,

*"In thee, O God, do we put our trust, let us never be ashamed; yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed. Truly our souls wait upon God, from him cometh our salvation; he only is our rock and our salvation! In him is our glory, our strength, and our refuge, and from him is our expectation."*<sup>44</sup>

In adoration of God's power, he wrote, *"We know, O God, that thou canst do everything ... Power belongs to thee; and with thee nothing is impossible. All power is thine, both in heaven and on earth. Thou killest and thou makest alive, thou woundest and thou healest, neither is there any that can deliver out of thy hand. What thou hast promised thou art able also to perform."*<sup>45</sup>

Other sections such as confession and petition also have detailed outlines. Henry's method would give remarkable depth and variety to our prayers if we consulted his book regularly for guidance. His method would deliver our prayers from bland repetition and thoughtless irreverence. It would help us become more specific as well as more brokenhearted in our confession of sin, leading us to pray:

*"We have not had the rule we ought to have over our own spirits, which have therefore been as a city that is broken down and has no walls. We have been too soon angry, and anger hath rested in our bosoms: and when our spirits have been provoked, we have spoken unadvisedly with our lips, and have been guilty of that clamour and bitterness which should have been put far from us."*<sup>46</sup>

Henry's words of confession are humbling. In our glib and frivolous day, we might hesitate to give such careful thought to confessing our sins.

But Ligon Duncan writes, *"Henry understood that without the inclusion of sufficient confession of sin in our prayers, we will never attain a real and right sense of divine forgiveness and reconciliation ... We will be burdened by unresolved guilt – or else cope with that nagging guilt through denial, delusion, and self-deception."*<sup>47</sup>

Our intercessions for the church would likewise be more pointed and powerful if we used words such as these:

*"Let pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, flourish and prevail everywhere; that kingdom of God among men, which is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. O revive this work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known, and let our times be times of reformation."*<sup>48</sup>

We might then cry out with scriptural boldness,

*"Let no weapon formed against thy church prosper, and let every tongue that riseth against it in judgment be condemned."*<sup>49</sup>

Henry also marshaled Scriptures for our intercession for the lost world and the propagation of the gospel to all nations. He called us to pray for all men, to cry out that the nations would praise the Lord and sing for joy, to pray for the conversion of the Jewish people, for the suffering churches in Islamic nations, and for the conversion of atheists and deists. He instructed his readers to pray,

*"O give thy Son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession; for thou hast said, It is a light thing for him to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel, but thou wilt give him for a light to the Gentiles. Let all the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ."*<sup>50</sup>

Praying the Scriptures back to God will certainly lead us to pray for missions.



## **Conclusion: Pray the Scriptures**

We have only scratched the surface of Henry's book. In addition to many more scriptural prayers of adoration, confession, petition for ourselves, thanksgiving, and intercession for others, Henry also assembled Scriptures into a multi-page paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, a set of simple Bible prayers for children, prayers for children based on catechism answers, scriptural prayers for family devotions in the morning and evening and on the Lord's Day, a parent's prayers for children, prayers to prepare for the Lord's Supper, and prayers to say at mealtimes. Henry's *Family Hymns* (1694), a collection of selections from the Psalms and passages from the New Testament in poetic form, can also enrich family worship with biblical truth.<sup>51</sup> Duncan says of the *Method for Prayer*,

*"Reading and rereading Henry's book will train us in the use of biblical truth and language in prayer, and thus assist and encourage modern Christians in both public and private prayer."*

Praying the Scriptures will *"engrave in our minds biblical patterns of thought"* and move us to a *"God-centered way of praying."*<sup>52</sup>

We should learn from Henry's great maxim: pray the Scriptures. In this assertion, Henry stood with Reformed writers through the ages.

William Gurnall (1616-1679) wrote, *"The mightier any is in the Word, the more mighty he will be in prayer."*

Later, Robert M'Cheyne (1813-1843) said, *"Turn the Bible into prayer."*<sup>53</sup>

Nothing is surer or more helpful as a rule or guide in prayer than the whole Word of God. All this echoes the magisterial words of Christ,

*"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."*

(John 15:7)

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<sup>1</sup> "Matthew Henry's *A Method for Prayer* was, by its sheer popularity, a classic which for a hundred and fifty years went through more than thirty editions" (Hughes Oliphant Old, "The Reformed Daily Office: A Puritan Perspective," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 12, no. 4 [1978]: 9). Cf. idem, "Matthew Henry and the Puritan Discipline of Family Prayer," in *Calvin Studies* 7, ed. John H. Leith (Davidson, N.C.: Davidson College, 1994), 69-91.

<sup>2</sup> Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 323-28; J. Ligon Duncan III, "A Method for Prayer by Matthew Henry (1662-1714)," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 239-40.

<sup>3</sup> *The Complete Works of the Rev. Matthew Henry* (1855; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2:1-95. These complete works do not include his commentaries or the recently published *Matthew Henry's Unpublished Sermons on The Covenant of Grace*, ed. Allan Harman (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:198-247. Both *A Method for Prayer* and *Directions for Daily Communion with God* have been republished as a single book: Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan III (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> J. B. Williams, *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 2:210.

<sup>6</sup> Henry, *The Covenant of Grace*, 200.

<sup>7</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:199.

<sup>8</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:199-200.

<sup>9</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:201-202.

<sup>10</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:203-204.

<sup>11</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:204-205.

<sup>12</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:205.

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- <sup>13</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:205-206.
- <sup>14</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:207-208.
- <sup>15</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:208.
- <sup>16</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:208-211.
- <sup>17</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:213-15.
- <sup>18</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:215. The quotation is from "The Bag" in George Herbert, *The Temple* (1633), <http://www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/Bag.html> (accessed December 3, 2010).
- <sup>19</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:216-18.
- <sup>20</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:219-24.
- <sup>21</sup> Williams, *Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry*, 2:211. See Matt. 6:5-6.
- <sup>22</sup> Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 327.
- <sup>23</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:224-25.
- <sup>24</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:225.
- <sup>25</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:225-27.
- <sup>26</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:231.
- <sup>27</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:235-36.
- <sup>28</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:237.
- <sup>29</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:238-40.
- <sup>30</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:243.
- <sup>31</sup> Henry, *The Covenant of Grace*, 185, 200.
- <sup>32</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:228.
- <sup>33</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:2-3.
- <sup>34</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:204.
- <sup>35</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, introduction to Matthew Henry, *A Way to Pray: A Biblical Method for Enriching Your Prayer Life and Language by Shaping Your Words with Scripture*, ed. O. Palmer Robertson (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), xii. Robertson writes of this republication of Henry's *Method for Prayer*, "This current edition does not represent simply an effort to modernize the language of Matthew Henry's original. Instead it is an effort to provide a respectful but thorough reworking of the text of Matthew Henry in light of careful exegetical considerations." Robertson has removed some of Henry's materials, added some of his own, and presented a fresh translation of the Scriptures (ibid., xvii).
- <sup>36</sup> Duncan, "A Method for Prayer," in *The Devoted Life*, 241.
- <sup>37</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:2-3.
- <sup>38</sup> Duncan, "A Method for Prayer," in *The Devoted Life*, 240. The Westminster Directory set forth this order of worship: 1) a call to worship, 2) a prayer acknowledging God's greatness, 3) Scripture reading, 4) singing a psalm, 5) a prayer of confession and petition for grace through the Mediator for the church, worldwide missions, and the governing authorities, 6) preaching the Word, 7) a prayer of thanksgiving and petition for grace, 8) the Lord's Prayer, 9) singing a psalm, and 10) dismissal. See *The Westminster Directory of Public Worship*, discussed by Mark Dever and Sinclair Ferguson (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2008).
- <sup>39</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:3.
- <sup>40</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:204.
- <sup>41</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:4.
- <sup>42</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:4-12.
- <sup>43</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:5. See Ex. 15:11.
- <sup>44</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:10-11. See Ps. 31:1; 25:3; 62:1, 2, 5-7.
- <sup>45</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:6. See Job 42:2; Ps. 62:11; Luke 1:37; Matt. 28:18; Deut. 32:39; Rom. 4:21.
- <sup>46</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:15. See Prov. 25:28; 14:17; Eccl. 7:9; Ps. 106:33; Eph. 4:31.
- <sup>47</sup> Duncan, "A Method for Prayer," in *The Devoted Life*, 244.
- <sup>48</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:50. See James 1:27; Rom. 14:17; Hab. 3:2; Heb. 9:10.
- <sup>49</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:51. See Isa. 54:17.
- <sup>50</sup> Henry, *Works*, 2:48-49. See Ps. 2:8; Isa. 49:6. See also chapter 11, "Puritan Prayers for World Missions."
- <sup>51</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:413-43.
- <sup>52</sup> Duncan, "A Method for Prayer," in *The Devoted Life*, 249.
- <sup>53</sup> Cited in John Blanchard, comp., *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 473.