

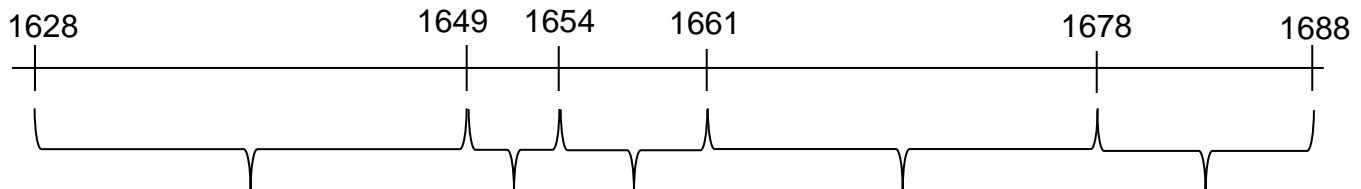
# Session 4: Lessons from John Bunyan's Prayer Life

Six Men and Their Prayer Lives – Monday Night Bible Study 2025  
Michael Garreau



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## I. Synopsis of John Bunyan's Life



## II. Bunyan's Teaching on Prayer

### A. *Prayer is impossible without the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the Holy Spirit of God.*

1. Bunyan's definition of prayer:
  - a) *Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God hath promised, or according to the Word, for the good of the church, with submission, in faith, to the will of God.<sup>1</sup>*
2. Commenting on Paul's words in Romans 8 that "the Spirit also helps our weakness," Bunyan writes,
  - a) *The apostles, when they were at the best, yea, when the Holy Ghost assisted them, yet then they were fain to come off with sighs and groans, falling short of expressing their mind, but with sighs and groans which cannot be uttered. ...But here now, the wise men of our days are so well skilled as that they have both the manner and matter of their prayers at their finger-ends; setting such a prayer for such a day, and that twenty years before it comes.*
3. According to Bunyan, true prayer is always by and with the Spirit. Bunyan perceived that the Book of Common Prayer easily \_\_\_\_\_ a dependence on God's Spirit and this he opposed.
  - a) *And it is the Spirit only that can teach us so to ask; it only being able to search out all things, even the deep things of God. Without which Spirit, though we had a thousand Common Prayer Books, yet we know not what we should pray for as we ought,*

<sup>1</sup> John Bunyan, "A Discourse on Prayer," in *The Complete Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 1 (Marshallton, DE: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), 260.

*being accompanied with those infirmities that make us absolutely incapable of such a work.<sup>2</sup>*

**B. Only the Spirit can prepare us to pray by making us \_\_\_\_\_ of our deep spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ and by pointing us to Christ.**

1. Only those who are conscious of their spiritual need can pray aright. But Bunyan also understood that we are entirely dependent on God's Spirit to reveal that need to us.

a) *Nothing but the Spirit can show a man clearly his misery by nature, and so put a man into a posture of prayer. Talk is but talk, as we use to say, and so it is but mouth-worship, if there be not a sense of misery, and that effectually too.<sup>3</sup>*

2. It's not enough to have a sense of need, the Spirit must also show us what to do with that need, how to bring it to God. The Spirit must reveal \_\_\_\_\_ to us as our only way of access to God.

a) *It must be in or with the Spirit; for without that no man can know how he should come to God the right way.<sup>4</sup>*

b) *...here is the life of prayer, when in or with the Spirit, a man being made sensible of sin, and how to come to the Lord for mercy; he comes, I say, in the strength of the Spirit, and crieth Father. That one word spoken in faith, is better than a thousand prayers, as men call them, written and read, in a formal, cold, lukewarm way.<sup>5</sup>*

**C. Only the Spirit can \_\_\_\_\_ us to pray with a whole heart and with the deepest sincerity and affection.**

1. For Bunyan, there should be nothing \_\_\_\_\_ or rote about prayer. Prayer must come from one's whole heart.

a) *"Take heed that thy heart go to God as well as thy mouth. Let not thy mouth go any further than thou strivest to draw thine heart along with it. David would lift his heart and soul to the Lord; and good reason; for so far as a man's mouth goeth along without his heart, so far it is but lip-labour only;<sup>6</sup>*

b) *"When thou prayest, rather let thy hearts be without words, than thy words without a heart."<sup>7</sup>*

2. This kind of whole-hearted praying is impossible without the help of the Holy Spirit.

a) *As the heart must be lifted up by the Spirit, if it pray aright, so also it must be held up by the Spirit when it is up, if it continue to pray aright. ...And indeed here is the life of prayer, to have the heart kept with God in the duty.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Bunyan, 267.

<sup>3</sup> Bunyan, 267.

<sup>4</sup> Bunyan, 268.

<sup>5</sup> Bunyan, 268.

<sup>6</sup> Bunyan, "A Discourse on Prayer," 276.

<sup>7</sup> John Bunyan, *Bunyan's Dying Sayings* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2006), 65.

<sup>8</sup> Bunyan, 269.

**D. Only the Spirit can \_\_\_\_\_ our prayers so that we ask according to God's \_\_\_\_\_ and will.**

1. Although Bunyan speaks of our groaning in prayer, yet he also adamantly guards against prayer as being a mindless exercise. True praying, is praying with the understanding, it is \_\_\_\_\_ praying.

a) *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.*<sup>9</sup>

b) *Consider seriously what thou wantest. Do not, as many who in their words only beat the air, and ask for such things as indeed they do not desire, nor see that they stand in need thereof. 2. When thou seest what thou wantest, keep to that, and take heed thou pray sensibly.*<sup>10</sup>

2. Prayer must not only be intelligent, it must be according to God's revealed \_\_\_\_\_.

a) *Prayer it is, when it is within the compass of God's Word; and it is blasphemy, or at best vain babbling, when the petition is beside the book. ...And indeed the Holy Ghost doth not immediately quicken and stir up the heart of the Christian without, but by, with, and through the Word, by bringing that to the heart, and by opening of that, whereby the man is provoked to go to the Lord, and to tell him how it is with him, and also to argue, and supplicate, according to the Word;*<sup>11</sup>

### III. Cautions in Prayer

**A. Beware of \_\_\_\_\_ prayer.**

a) *There is an iniquity that attends the closet, which I may call by the name of vacancy. When men have a closet to talk of, not to pray in; ...Many there be that profess Christ who do oftener, in London frequent the coffee-house than their closet;*<sup>12</sup>

2. Neglect in prayer is a symptom of a heart that doesn't \_\_\_\_\_ God.

a) *Did I say that hearty, fervent, and constant prayer flowed from this fear of God? ...O prayerless man, thou fearest not God!*<sup>13</sup>

**B. Beware of wrong \_\_\_\_\_ in prayer**

a) *Another "sort of prayer that will not be accepted of God, it is, when either they pray for wrong things, or if for right things, yet that the thing prayed for might be spent upon their lusts, and laid out to wrong ends. ...Ends contrary to God's will is a great argument with God to frustrate the petitions presented before him. Hence it is that so many pray for this and that, and yet receive it not. God answers them only with silence; they have their words for their labour; and that is all.*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bunyan, 271.

<sup>10</sup> Bunyan, 276.

<sup>11</sup> Bunyan, 265.

<sup>12</sup> John Bunyan, "A Holy Life the Beauty of Christianity," in *The Complete Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 2 (Marshallton, DE: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), 322.

<sup>13</sup> John Bunyan, "A Treatise on the Fear of God," in *The Complete Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 2 (Marshallton, DE: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), 428.

<sup>14</sup> Bunyan, "A Discourse on Prayer," 275.

**C. Beware of praying while \_\_\_\_\_ sin in your life.**

a) *He therefore that approacheth the presence of Christ in prayer, or any other divine appointment, must take heed of regarding 'iniquity in his heart.' (Psa. 66:18) Else the Lord will stop his ears to his prayers, and will shut his eyes, and not take notice of such kind of worship or worshippers.<sup>15</sup>*

**D. Beware of allowing \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ to turn you away from prayer.**

1. Don't let your sin drive you away from God; let it drive you to God in confession and repentance.

a) *"Another time of need is, the time of guilt contracted, and of the hiding of God's face. This is a dangerous time. If thou now shalt forbear to pray, thou art undone, for the natural tendency of guilt is to drive a man from God. ...Wherefore, when this needy, this evil time has overtaken thee, pray: 'Come boldly unto the throne of grace, to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.'"<sup>16</sup>*

2. Prayer is instrumental in laying hold of the \_\_\_\_\_ of God which can unlock the door to our prison of guilt and doubt.

a) *"Well, on Saturday, about midnight, they began to pray, and continued in prayer till almost break of day. Now, a little before it was day, good Christian, as one half-amazed, brake out in this passionate speech: What a fool, quoth he, am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty! I have a key in my bosom, called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle."<sup>17</sup>*

## IV. Summary

1. We are praying in the Spirit when we consciously depend on his strength and help.
2. We are praying in the Spirit when we pray out of an awareness of our deep spiritual need.
3. We are praying in the Spirit when we understand the provision God has made for our spiritual needs in Jesus Christ.
4. We are praying in the Spirit when the desires of our hearts accompany our words.
5. We are praying in the Spirit when we are led by him to ask for those things which are in accord with God's word and will.

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<sup>15</sup> Bunyan, "A Holy Life the Beauty of Christianity," 301.

<sup>16</sup> John Bunyan, "The Saint's Privilege and Profit," in *The Complete Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 3 (Marshallton, DE: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), 304.

<sup>17</sup> John Bunyan, "The Pilgrim's Progress," in *The Complete Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 1 (Marshallton, DE: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1968), 57.