

“Having read Arthur Bennett’s *The Valley of Vision* multiple times, I’ve always hoped someone else would mine the writings of the Puritans for more Scripture-drenched, Christ-exalting, God-glorifying, heartfelt prayers. My wait is over. Tim Chester has produced a volume eminently useful for private devotions, public gatherings and personal reflection. I expect his carefully chosen, thoughtfully organized, and beautifully edited prayers will serve the church for many generations to come.”

BOB KAUFILIN

Director, Sovereign Grace Music

“These superb prayers model and teach a rich, deep devotion to God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Soaked in Scripture, they are wonderfully realistic about the life of faith. From a prayer for unbelieving children to a prayer with a dying Christian, with every style from the gripping logic of John Owen to the passionate warmth of Samuel Rutherford, these old believers walk with us in deepening our own lives of prayer. Tim Chester has done us a great service in editing and updating them so beautifully and clearly.”

CHRISTOPHER ASH

Writer in Residence, Tyndale House

“I greatly appreciate the effort Tim Chester has gone to in this beautiful book, not only to organise and translate the biblically and doctrinally rich words of the Puritans into a language I can pray myself today, but also to note where these exquisite treasures can be found in their original settings. Full of arresting images and comforting truths, this is a precious resource to come back to time and again for spiritual refreshment, pastoral challenge, and pure adoration of our gracious and sovereign God.”

LEE GATISS

Series Editor, The Complete Works of John Owen

“These pages are a great gift from Dr Tim Chester to help us ‘to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever’ and to experience the love of Christ, as Paul says, ‘together with all the saints’. There is something in *Into His Presence* to help all of us to experience communion with God in every situation of life. Tim Chester has given us a treasure trove.”

SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

Chancellor's Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary

“The apostle Paul wrote that ‘we do not know what to pray for as we should’. All Christians find themselves, from time to time, knowing they need to pray but not knowing how. These prayers, taken from the writings of our brothers and sisters of the past, are a blessed guide to prayer when we lack words of our own.”

ERIC SCHUMACHER

Pastor, author and songwriter

“The Puritans knew their God, not just in their brains, but in the bruises of life’s afflictions, and they sought him with all their hearts. Tim Chester brings us into the Puritans’ prayer closet to learn from their devotion. Some of these selections are Puritan prayers, some are the thoughts and phrases of Puritan teachings freshly woven into prayers, and all are fervent pantings of the soul after the glorious, triune God.”

JOEL R. BEEKE

President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

TIM CHESTER

INTO HIS
PRESENCE

Praying with the Puritans

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INTRODUCTION

*Without often seeking God, the vitality of the soul is lost.
We may as well expect a harvest without sowing, as any
liveliness of grace where there is no seeking God.*

—Thomas Manton¹

The Puritans were people of prayer. Many Puritan pastors rose early to pray, like Joseph Alleine who spent the time between 4am and 8am in personal worship, and felt ashamed if he heard the blacksmith at work before he was at prayer. Each year Isaac Ambrose took himself off into the woods for a month to spend uninterrupted time alone in prayer and meditation. Puritan families were encouraged to read the Scriptures and pray together each morning and evening, with pastors providing model prayers for those who were unsure where to begin.

Yet the Puritans were not fixated on prayer itself; they were fixated on God. Prayer was merely the means; it was God himself who was their goal. Their spirituality was characterised by a big view of God. They felt keenly the vast gulf between God's holiness and human sinfulness—a gulf into which a Christian might have plunged were it not for God's grace to us in Christ. Again and again in their prayers we see a recognition of the depths of our sin enlarging a vision of the heights of Christ's love.

Their big vision of God did not mean their God was remote. Quite the opposite. His activity permeated the whole of life. The Puritans had a high view of God’s providence. All their comforts came from his hand and were to be received with gratitude. But hardships, too, were part of his mysterious design. All of life—from daily prayers to work and home life—was to be lived before God, with his help.



I love doing cryptic crosswords. My aim is to start one at breakfast and finish it during my mid-morning tea break. See if you can work out this clue:

Strait-laced girl enters into the joke.

The answer is “puritan”. “Girl enters into joke” is the cryptic part of the clue (“pu[rita]n”). The straight part of the clue is, if you’ll excuse the pun, “strait-laced”. It’s an example of the bad press with which Puritanism has often been dogged. The implication is that the Puritans opposed fun.

It’s true that Puritans were serious about their faith. But, as the prayers in this book reveal, they also enjoyed life. They expressed gratitude to God for food, fun and friendship. Even more, they enjoyed God. They pursued the pleasures of God.

Puritanism began in England in the second half of the 16th century, during the reign of Elizabeth I, as a reform movement within the Church of England. Its passion was to see a church shaped by the Bible with a gospel of justification by

faith alone. Many of its early leaders had escaped the persecutions of Mary I in the 1550s through exile in Europe. Here they were strongly influenced by the Reformed tradition. Their hopes for spiritual renewal were dashed when James I, Elizabeth's successor, showed no interest in radical reform. This was when the Pilgrim Fathers set sail for safety in America. Then, under Charles I, Puritans were often persecuted.

The Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell gave Puritans a voice in national affairs. But it was short-lived. The monarchy was restored in 1660, and in 1662 hundreds of Puritans were forced out of the Church of England in "the Great Ejection". Many went underground, holding secret meetings (called "conventicles") or gathering congregations in their homes. But by the end of the 17th century the movement had ceased to exist as a distinct force in national life.

Yet the spirituality of Puritanism lives on in its writings. Here we find a rich store of treasures which continue to provide both theological clarity and pastoral comfort. It is these treasures I have plundered in this book. Around half the prayers in this book are Puritan prayers which I've edited. The other half I've created out of descriptive passages from Puritan sermons or books. In both cases I've updated the language while trying to retain the feel of the original writers. Choosing extracts was not easy. Samuel Bolton, John Bunyan, Jeremiah Burroughs and Ezekiel Hopkins were all well represented on the shortlist, but somehow didn't quite make the final cut.

I hope that this book will give you a flavour of Puritan spirituality that might prompt you to explore their writing further. But that has not been my primary aim. My primary aim has been to provide prayers to be prayed. These prayers are not historical curiosities; they are powerful expressions of faith that can enrich our spiritual lives. That's why I've organised them under headings that flag up when and how they might be used. They're designed to be put to work. You could read one a day, but you can also turn to them in need. You could use them on your own, but you can also use them in public worship.

The Puritan Ezekiel Hopkins describes God as “the great proprietor”. Everything we could desire—whether spiritual or temporal blessings, whether greater faith, love, patience or humility—are on the shelves in God's great department store (or in the catalogue of his online outlet). And prayer, says Hopkins, is “a means appointed by God to obtain those blessings and mercies of which we stand in need”. Then he changes the imagery:

Our prayers and God's mercy are like two buckets in a well. While the one ascends, the other descends. So, while our prayers ascend to God in heaven, his mercies and blessings descend upon us.²

Here are 80 prayers to fill our buckets with before we send them up to God, and wait for his bucket of blessing to come down to us.

PRAYERS OF PRAISE
TO THE FATHER

I. KIND AND TENDER

Loving Father, may we see you as love,
not with anxious and doubtful thoughts,
nor questioning your good-will and kindness,
but seeing in your heart
the fountain of all goodness.
May we not look on you as a frowning father,
but as a Father who is most kind and tender.
For your love is the love of one who is all-sufficient,
infinitely satiated with yourself
and your glorious perfections,
with no need to look for love in others.
There might you have rested in contentment for ever,
rejoicing in your Son for all eternity,
but you chose to love your saints,
seeking not your satisfaction alone, but our good.
This is your love, the love of a Father,
going out in kindness and bounty.
Your love is an eternal love,
fixed on us before the foundation of the world,
before we were, or had done, the least good.
This thought alone makes all that is within us leap for joy.
We prostrate our souls in humble, holy reverence,
and rejoice before you with trembling.

Help us, we pray, to believe
that such is your fatherly heart towards us.
May our minds know it,
may our wills embrace it,
may our affections be filled with it.
Let us be bound with the cords of this love.
This is your great pleasure, Father,
that we see you
full of love
and tenderness
and kindness towards us.
Flesh and blood are so apt to have hard thoughts of you.
We are afraid to think well of you.
We think it a boldness to look on you
as good, gracious, tender, kind, loving.
Assure us, we pray,
that there is nothing more acceptable to you
than for us to keep our hearts close to you
as the eternal fountain of all that rich grace
which flows out to sinners in the blood of Jesus.
As we sit down a little at this fountain,
may we discover the sweetness of its streams.
And so may we, who once ran from you in fear,
not be able to keep at a distance—even for a moment.

JOHN OWEN

2. YOU ARE OUR GOD

O God, you are our God:
our strong tower, our fountain of living water,
our Father, a Father of mercies,
an everlasting Father in heaven.

O God, you are our God,
by your grace planted in us,
and by the pledge of your Spirit.
May he stamp the imprint of holiness in our hearts;
embroidering and bespangling our souls,
making them glorious within.
May he, by his magnetic virtue, draw our hearts to you:
our paradise of delight and our chief treasure!
May our hearts be so chained to you
that nothing else can enchant us or draw us from you.
Though our flesh be on earth,
may our hearts be in heaven.
When you say to our souls, "You are mine,"
may our souls answer: "Lord, we are yours;
all I have is at your service;
my head shall be yours to study you;
my tongue shall be yours to praise you."

O God, you are our God,
and so, though we may feel the stroke of evil,

we do not feel the sting,
for nothing can ultimately hurt us.
If we lose our name—it is written in the book of life.
If we lose our liberty—our conscience is free.
If we lose our belongings—
we possess the pearl of great price.
If we meets with storms—
we know where to put in for harbour.
When there is a storm outside,
you can make music within.
Our souls are safe, as in a garrison,
hid in the promises,
hid in the wounds of Christ;
hid in your eternal decree.

O God, you are our God, and all that is in you is ours.
You say to us: “All that I have shall be yours;
my wisdom shall be yours to teach you;
my power shall be yours to support you;
my mercy shall be yours to save you.”

We may lose everything else,
but we cannot lose you:
you are ours *from* everlasting in election
and *to* everlasting in glory.

THOMAS WATSON

3. ONE STRING TO THE BOW

Lord God, you and you alone
should be the sole object of our trust.
May there be but one string to the bow of our faith:
that is you, our Lord.
May we not rest in any thing other than you.
Forgive us when we trust in our heads,
for our own understanding is an unsafe place to lean.
Forgive us when we trust in our hearts,
for they are so deceitful and wicked.
Forgive us when we trust in our vigour,
for our hands will soon hang down and faint.
Forgive us when we trust in any excellences,
for the best of us in our best state is altogether vanity.
Forgive us when we trust in riches,
for riches are fair-faced nothings,
taking flight like birds.
Forgive us when we trust in human allies,
for they prove not to be staffs but broken reeds.
But on this the arm of trust may safely lean:
your almighty arm and power;
and your infinite goodness, mercy, and bounty.

THOMAS LYE

4. RESTING ON GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

Lord God, how I thank you
because you have given me yourself,
and an interest in all your glorious attributes:
whatever is in you shall be mine, and for me.

Oh, what encouragement to faith:
to be assured that all your attributes are mine;
as much mine as the drink in my cup
and the food on my plate.

May the hands of my faith take hold of these two handles:
that you are willing and able.

For there is no condition into which I can fall
but some divine attribute can support me.

I rest on your omnipotence
when surrounded by troubles and dangers.
When I am called to difficult duties above my strength,
strong lusts to oppose,
violent temptations to resist,
weighty employments to undertake,
may faith support me on your omnipotence.

I rest on your omniscience
when I don't know what to do,
when I'm at my wit's end,
for you know how to deliver the righteous.

When I'm afraid my treacherous heart will deceive me,
when I'm worn down by Satan's accusations,
let your omniscience support me.

I rest on your immensity
when deserted by friends, or separated from them,
or when I fear remote intrigues in other countries,
for you, Lord, are everywhere.

I rest in your all-sufficiency.
Do I want riches? You are all-sufficient.
Do I want liberty? You are liberty.
Do I want comfort? You are in the means of grace.
Do I fear death? You are life.
Do I fear being cast off? You are unchangeable.

I rest in your mercy.
There is no condition so low that mercy cannot reach it,
none so bad that mercy cannot better it,
none so bitter that mercy cannot sweeten it,
none so hopeless that mercy cannot comfort in it.

I rest in your purity.
For in your jealousy of sin,
you will be a consuming fire to my lusts, but not to me.

I rest in your justice.
Lord, I have sinned, and deserve your wrath;
but Christ, my Surety, has done and suffered

all that your righteous law requires.
He was wounded for my transgressions,
and your justice will not punish
the same offences twice.

Riches are an uncertain, unsatisfying, limited,
deceitful nothing.
You are an unchangeable, satisfying, all-sufficient,
faithful everything.

I am full of sin;
you are merciful.

I am unworthy;
you are gracious.

I have abused your grace;
you are patient.

I have tried your patience;
you bear with me in love.

I have tested your love;
you are faithful.

I am unfaithful;
you are infinite.

DAVID CLARKSON