

VOICES FROM THE PAST  
  
PURITAN DEVOTIONAL READINGS



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READINGS

*Edited by*  
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THE BANNER OF TRUTH TRUST

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In memory of my lovely Mother  
who showed me how to be faithful unto death.

In her last battle  
she never lost her faith and hope.  
She said confidently:  
'We did not ask for this,  
but the Lord will walk us through it.'

To my Father  
who showed me the importance of  
maintaining personal integrity  
no matter what the cost,  
by the faithful example of his life.

And to my friend Iain Murray,  
a faithful pastor who has been so kind to me,  
and who inspired my interest in the Puritans  
by his message at a  
Banner of Truth conference,  
June 3, 1998,  
'The Puritans' Success through Suffering'

To these  
I joyfully dedicate this  
labour of love.



## PREFACE

Over the past fifty years there has been a great resurgence of interest in the writings of the Puritans. The reading of their works have brought great benefit to the people of God in many lands. I am greatly indebted to those faithful ministers of the gospel who continue to speak through their writings even though they themselves have long since entered into their heavenly reward. The Puritans really knew how to teach and apply God's word in the Spirit's power!

I have gained great personal help from several recurring themes found in their writings. How thrilling it has been for me to read the Puritans on the glory and attributes of God, divine providence, fellowship with God, holiness of life and the mortification of indwelling sin, heavenly mindedness, prayer, evangelistic zeal, and trust in times of affliction. At every turn these truths are eloquently taught, faithfully applied, and kindly offered as the subject of sweet spiritual meditation. It is my prayer that this book of daily readings, which I have extracted from some of my favourite Puritan authors, will stimulate you to explore further the writings of these spiritual giants.

The devotional readings which follow in these pages are sometimes almost exact word for word copies of the original. In many places the old language has been retained when to modernize it would have blunted the sharp cutting edge of the original. At other times I have paraphrased the original with up-to-date phrases which I trust accurately convey the sense of the author and retain something of his 'fire'. While some of the devotions appear almost as written, others have been condensed, so that several pages form a single devotional reading. In so doing I have always sought to be faithful to the intent of the author and have provided references to the original source material. The devotions may on occasions seem a little abrupt in their flow of thought; this is due to the abridgment of multiple pages into

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a convenient extract of approximately 350 words. The Scripture verse at the head of each page was selected according to the theme of the reading and not necessarily by the Puritan author. The Scripture version used is the English Standard Version (ESV).

May these daily devotional readings open a door for many to the vast stores of treasure to be found in the writings of the Puritans. I am deeply thankful to the Lord for the influence the Puritans have had upon my own spiritual life. I also feel a great debt of gratitude to the founders of the Banner of Truth Trust, for their vision and determination to make these old but precious volumes available to new generations of Christian readers.

RICHARD RUSHING,  
Martinez  
California  
2009

*Because you are but a young man, beware of temptations and snares; and above all, be careful to keep yourself in the use of means; resort to good company; and howbeit you be nicknamed a Puritan, and mocked, yet care not for that, but rejoice and be glad, that they who are scorned and scoffed by this godless and vain world, and nicknamed Puritans, would admit you to their society; for I must tell you, when I am at this point as you see me, I get no comfort to my soul by any second means under heaven but from those who are nicknamed Puritans. They are the men that can give a word of comfort to a wearied soul in due season, and that I have found by experience since I did lie down here.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> *The Last and Heavenly Speeches, and Glorious Departure, of John, Viscount Kenmure*, in *Scottish Puritans—Select Biographies*, Vol. 1, (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 2008) p. 400.



## If God is for us, who can be against us?

*Romans 8:31*

**D**o not be discouraged at the difficulties and oppositions that will rise up before you when you begin resolutely to walk with God. Discouragements turn multitudes from religion, and provide a great temptation for many young beginners to turn back. Israel in the wilderness was ready to retreat to Egypt. God himself will have his servants and his graces tried and exercised by difficulties, and Satan, will quickly raise up storms before us, as soon as we are set out to sea. But God is on your side and has all your enemies in his hand, and can rebuke them, or destroy them in a moment. O what is the breath or fury of dust or devils, against the Lord Almighty! In the day you entered into a covenant with God, and he with you, you entered into the most impregnable rock and fortress, and covered yourself in a castle of defence, where you may (modestly) defy all adverse powers of earth or hell. If God cannot save you, he is not God. And if he will not save you, he must break his covenant. Indeed, he may resolve to save you, not from affliction and persecution, but in it, and by it! But in all these things you will—‘Overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us’ (*Rom.* 8:37). It is far more desirable and excellent to conquer by patience, in suffering for Christ, than to conquer our persecutors in the field, by force of arms. O think on the saints’ triumphant boastings in their God: ‘God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble’ (*Psa.* 46:1). If all of the world were on your side, you might yet have cause to fear. But to have God on your side is infinitely more! Christ the Captain of your salvation has gone this way before you, and now he is engaged to make you a conqueror! Do not be afraid where Christ is leading the way. Do not draw back when you see his steps and his blood!

RICHARD BAXTER, *A Christian Directory*, 1:43

## Pray without ceasing.

*1 Thessalonians 5:17*

**T**he closet and solitary prayer is a necessary duty, and a profitable one. It does much for the enlargement of the heart. When a man seeks to deal most earnestly with God, he should seek retirement, and be alone. Christ in his agonies went apart from his disciples. It is notable that when Jacob sought to wrestle with God, it is said, 'And Jacob was left alone' (*Gen. 32:24*). When he had a mind to deal with God in great earnestness, he sent away all his company. A hypocrite finds a greater flash of gifts in his public duties; but he is slight and superficial when he is alone with God. Usually God's children are able to most affectionately pour out their hearts before him in private. Here, they find their affections free to wrestle with God. Here, one finds most communion with God, and enlargement of heart. In private we are wholly at leisure to deal with God in a child-like liberty. Now, will you omit this duty where you may be most free, without distraction, to let out your heart to God? The sweetest experiences of God's saints are when they are alone with him. Without seeking God often, the vitality of the soul is lost. We may as well expect a crop and harvest without sowing, as living grace without seeking of God. God is first cast out of the closet, and then out of the family, and within a little while, out of the congregation. Omit secret prayer, and some great sin will follow. A man who is often with God, does not dare to offend him so freely as others do. Religion, as it were, dies by degrees. Whatever else is forgotten, God must not be forgotten. Make God a good allowance. Make a prudent choice yourselves, and consecrate such a part of time as will suit with your occasions, your course of life, and according to your abilities and opportunities.

We are more than conquerors through him.

*Romans 8:37*

**T**he believer is to persevere in his Christian course to the end of his life. We have known many who have gone into the field, and liked the work of a soldier for a battle or two, but soon has had enough, and comes running home. There are so many professors and so few Christians indeed; so many that run and so few obtain; many go into the field against Satan, and so few come out conquerors. Few have the courage and resolution to grapple with the difficulties that meet them in the way. Israel came joyfully out of Egypt, but when their bellies were a little pinched with hunger, they were ready to fly from their colours, and make a dishonourable retreat into Egypt. Many who profess the gospel fail to endure when trouble comes, and Alas! Their hearts fail them. O how many depart from Christ at this cross-road! Do not say you have royal blood running in your veins, and you are born of God, except you can prove your pedigree by this heroic spirit; to dare to be holy in spite of men and devils. How uncomely a sight it is to see a bold sinner and a fearful saint; one resolved to be wicked, and a Christian wavering in his holy course; to see hell keep the field while the saints hide their colours for shame. Take heart O ye saints, and be strong; your cause is good. God himself adopts your quarrel. He shall lead you on with courage, and bring you off with honour. He lived and died for you. For mercy and tenderness to his soldiers, there is none like him. Christ poured out his blood as balm to heal our wounds. He never turned his head from danger: no, not even when hell's malice and heaven's justice appeared in the field against him! A few days' conflict will be crowned with heaven's glory. In a word, Christians, every exploit of faith causes a shout in heaven while you slip out of your enemies' hands!

WILLIAM GURNALL, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 1:15-17

But seek first the kingdom of God  
and his righteousness,  
and all these things will be added to you.

*Matthew 6:33*

Until we get our hearts out of the world, how easily our hearts are carried away with the thoughts of earthly concerns! Until we can separate and purge our spirits, how we mingle our prayers with many ridiculous thoughts! It is too usual for us to deal with God as an unskilled person that will gather a posy for his friend, and put in as many or more stinking weeds than he does choice flowers. The flesh introduces, and our carnal hearts insert and interlace our prayers with vain thoughts and earthly distractions. Then, when we come to offer incense to God with our censer, we mingle sulphur with our incense. Therefore, we should always labour to get our hearts above the world into the presence of God, as if we were by him in heaven, and wholly swallowed up with his glory. Though our bodies are on earth, our spirits should be in heaven. Until we get above the mists of the world, we can see nothing of clearness and comfort; but when we can get God and our hearts together, then we can see there is much in the fountain, though nothing in the stream; and though little on earth, yet we have a God in heaven! This is our great aim, to be with God in heaven. His residence is there, and we seek that our hearts might be there. We have liberty to ask supplies for the outward life, but chiefly we should ask spiritual and heavenly things: 'First, seek the kingdom of God' etc.. If God is our heavenly Father, our first and main care should be to ask things suitable to his being, and his excellencies. When we ask supplies of the outward life, food and raiment, God may give it to us, but it is far more pleasing to him when we ask for grace. In every prayer we should seek to be made more heavenly minded by conversing with our heavenly Father.

THOMAS MANTON, *Works*, 1:60-62

## We . . . glory in Christ Jesus.

*Philippians 3:3*

Consider the excellencies of the knowledge of Christ. The comfort of believers are streams from this fountain. Jesus Christ is the object of a believer's joy. Take away the knowledge of Christ, and Christians would be the most sad and melancholy beings in the world. Let Christ but manifest himself, and dart the beams of his light into their souls, and it will make them kiss the stake, sing in the flames, and shout in the pangs of death, as men that divide the spoil. We can perform no duty, enjoy no comfort, nor can we be saved without it (*John 17:3*). If it is life eternal to know Christ, then it is eternal damnation to be ignorant of Christ. Christ is the door that opens heaven, and knowledge is the key that opens Christ. It is profound; all other sciences are but shadows; this is a boundless, bottomless ocean; no creature has a line long enough to fathom its depths, there is height, length, depth, and breadth ascribed to it (*Eph. 3:18*), yea, it passes knowledge. Eternity itself cannot fully unfold him. It is like exploring a newly discovered land; by degrees you search further and further into the heart of the country. Ah, the best of us are yet on the borders of this vast continent! The study of Jesus Christ is the noblest subject that ever a soul spent itself upon. The angels stoop to look into this deep abyss. The truths discovered in Christ are the secrets that from eternity lay hid in the bosom of God. Studying Christ stamps a heavenly glory upon the contemplating soul. How little do we know of Christ, in comparison with what we might have known? O, how much time is spent in other studies and worldly employments; but how little in the search and study of Jesus Christ? O then, separate, devote, and wholly give yourself, your time, and your strength to this most sweet, transcendent study.

JOHN FLAVEL, *The Fountain of Life*, pp. 13-19

6 JANUARY

Therefore, brothers . . . we have confidence to enter  
the holy places by the blood of Jesus.

*Hebrews 10:19*

**J**esus appears before God for us; representing us continually before his Father, and mark; not only has Jesus this liberty to enter into heaven, but all the saints, and that, not only at death but in their life time! All of us, not only when we die, but now we have boldness to enter! The veil is rent, and now we have the privilege to come freely to converse with God. O, what a great privilege is this, that we have a Father in heaven! Though we do not have personal access till death, yet by the blood of Jesus we may come with boldness, presenting ourselves before the Lord with all our needs and desires. The great distance between heaven and earth shall not hinder our communion with God, since we have a friend above. Therefore it is very comfortable now to say: 'Our Father in heaven', that is, our gracious and reconciled Father, in and by Christ. Since we have a Father in heaven, let us look up to heaven often. Let me especially press you to this with an eye of faith; look within the veil, and when you come to pray, see God in heaven, and Christ at his right hand. The great work of faith is to see him that is invisible, and the great duty of prayer is to get a sight of God in heaven, and Christ at his right hand. A child is never so well but when he is in his mother's lap or under his father's wing. So with us in the presence of God, and getting into the bosom of our heavenly Father! Love it for his sake. O, let us not forget our heavenly Father's house. As we draw home quickly, let us grow more heavenly-minded every day; and seek the things above. The reason man is so haunted with the world, and the things of a worldly interest and concern when he comes to prayer, is because his heart is taken up too much with these things.

THOMAS MANTON, *Works*, 1:63-65

Agree with one another, live in peace;  
and the God of love and peace will be with you.

*2 Corinthians 13:11*

*A*s you seek the prosperity of this society, it is of vast importance that you should avoid contention. A contentious people will be a miserable people. The contentions that have been among you, since I was your pastor, have been one of the greatest burdens I have laboured under in the course of my ministry. Not only the contentions with me, but those with one another. Contention, heat of spirit, evil speaking, and things of like nature, are directly contrary to the spirit of Christianity, and did, in a peculiar manner, tend to drive away God's Spirit from a people, and to render all means of grace ineffectual, as well as to destroy a people's outward comfort and welfare. Let me therefore earnestly exhort you as you would seek your own future good hereafter, to watch against a contentious spirit (*1 Pet. 3:10-11*). I would particularly advise those that have adhered to me in the late controversy, to watch over your spirits and avoid all bitterness towards others. However wrong you may think others have been, maintain with great diligence and watchfulness a Christian meekness and gentleness of spirit; and labour, in this respect, to excel those who are of a contrary part. And this will be the best victory, for 'he that rules his spirit, is better than he that takes a city.' Let nothing be done through strife or conceit. Indulge no revengeful spirit in any case; but watch and pray against it; and, by all means in your power, seek the prosperity of this town. And never think you behave yourselves as becomes Christians, but when you sincerely, sensibly, and fervently love all men, of whatever party or opinion, and whether friendly or unkind, just or injurious, to you or your friends, or to the cause and kingdom of Christ.

JONATHAN EDWARDS, '*Farewell Sermon*', *Works*, 1:ccvi-ccvii

## Hallowed be your name.

*Matthew 6:9*

There is in each of us an envy; O how hard a matter it is to rejoice in the gifts, graces, and labours of others, and be content in circumstances, when God casts us by as unworthy, and uses others to glorify his name! We are troubled if others glorify God, and not us, or more than us, or if they are more holy, more useful, or more serious; self will not yield to this. Now by putting up this prayer to God, we leave it to him to choose the instrument that he will employ. We should be content to be abased and obscure provided Christ is honoured and exalted. Many times we must be content, not only to be active instruments but passive objects of his glory. If God will glorify himself by our poverty, or our disgrace, our pain and sickness, we must be content. We need to deal with God seriously about this matter that we may submit to the Lord's will as Jesus: 'Save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour: Father, glorify thy name' (*John 12:27-28*). This was the humble submission of Christ Jesus, and it should be in us! The martyrs were contented to be bound to the stake, if that way God might use them for his glory. 'My earnest expectation and hope . . . Christ . . . exalted in my body, whether by life or by death' (*Phil. 1:20*). We need to deal with God that we may have the end, and leave the means to his own choosing; that God may be glorified in our condition, whatever it is. If he wills for us to be rich and full, that he might be glorified in our bounty; if he wills for us to be poor and low, that he may be glorified in our patience; if he will have us healthy, that he may be glorified in our labour; if he will have us sick, that he may be glorified in our pain; if he will have us live, that he may be glorified in our lives; if he will have us die, that he may be glorified in our deaths (*Rom. 14:8*).

THOMAS MANTON, *Works*, 1:77

Let your light shine before others,  
 so that they may see your good works  
 and give glory our Father who is in heaven.

*Matthew 5:16*

**H**oliness is required, that we may not be a disgrace to God and a dishonour to him. The sin of God's people stains his honour and profanes his name. When men profess to be a people near God, and live carnally and loosely, they dishonour God exceedingly by their conversation. Men judge by what is visible, and so they think of God by his servants. Since Christ was holy, certainly Christians should live more temperately, justly, and soberly. Men are apt to think of God by his worshippers, and by the people that profess themselves near and dear to him; therefore it concerns us to walk so, that our lives may honour him. There is no way to honour God entirely and sincerely until we have learned both to know and to do his will. Otherwise we do but serve Christ as the devil served him, who would carry him upon the top of the mountain, but with the intent to bid him to throw himself down again. So we seem to exalt God much in our talk and profession; yea, but we throw him down, when we pollute him and deny him in our conversation. Our lives are the scandal of religion, and a pollution and blot to the name of God. So with respect to ourselves, you see what need we have to go to God, that he will give us grace that we may please him and glorify his name. Also a Christian should desire all others around him to also glorify God. A fire turns all things near it into fire, and leaven spreads until it has subdued the whole lump. So is the nature of grace, it loves to spread itself. We love to reach and diffuse our influence on others. False professors are not interested in those about them, but a true Christian will be earnest, and much in this matter. Therefore we need to be much in prayer that God's name will be hallowed!

THOMAS MANTON, *Works*, 1:78-79

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,  
do all to the glory of God.

*1 Corinthians 10:31*

**T**his life is not to be valued but as it yields opportunities to glorify God. We were not sent into the world to live for ourselves, but for God. If we could make ourselves, then we could live for ourselves. If we could be our own first cause, then we might be our own end. But God made us for himself, and sent us into the world for himself. It is not our duty to glorify God in heaven only, but also here on earth in the midst of difficulties and temptations. No one is sent into the world to be idle, or to bring forth fruit to themselves, but God's glory must be our chief work and aim while we are here upon earth. We must not promote merely our own interests. Every man, besides his general calling, has his own work and course of service where he might glorify and honour God; 'I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do' (*John 17:4*). In a great house one has one employment, one another: so God has designed for every man the work he has to do; some in one calling, and some in another; but all have their service and work given them for God's glory. Every morning we should revive the sense of this upon our hearts. This day I am going to live with God. When a Christian leaves home in the morning, he must remember he is at Christ's disposal; he is not to do as he pleases, but to be guided by rule, and for God's glory. Not only in our duties or immediate conversation with God, but in our sports, business, and recreation. What is it to do things in the name of Christ?—But to do it according to Christ's will and command! In discharge of this work, we must do it all for God's glory. We can do nothing without him. If we have anything to do for God, we must do it in his own strength, in every word and every deed.