



EVERYDAY
PRAYER

with the

REFORMERS



DONALD K. MCKIM

EVERYDAY
PRAYER

with the

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DONALD K. MCKIM



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To three friends and persons of prayer:

George Barnes

Buzzy Boehme

David L. McClenahan

With appreciation for our friendship, good times together,
and gratitude for your lives and witness to Jesus Christ

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PREFACE

THIS book follows *Everyday Prayer with John Calvin* (P&R, 2019) to express the theology and practice of prayer as understood by Protestant Reformers. Calvin's teachings on prayer were deep and robust. His insights were continued and extended by his contemporaries and successors in sixteenth and seventeenth century Protestant movements. This book presents quotations from these Reformers and my comments about their meaning and significance for Christian people who today live lives of faith and who pray.

My approach here is to provide a series of short devotional reflections on quotations from Protestant Reformers that are drawn from a variety of sources. Information on the writers and sources of these quotations is provided at the end of the book. The writers are Protestants who were involved in significant ministries throughout Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In England, a number of these writers served what became the Church of England. Examples of Reformers' prayers are given so that readers can "hear their voices" as they prayed.

My vocational passion for providing books to introduce important theologians through comments on their quotations has grown in the past years. My hope is these books will open the treasures of theologians to those who are not familiar with their writings. The fact that their theological comments can nurture and benefit our Christian lives today shows that their

theologies can live in the church and with Christian believers in the present time. Perhaps readers of the devotions will go on to explore more insights from these theologians. I hope so.

Prayer is a prime topic for theological reflection. Christian people pray. They pray in faith and move on toward understandings of prayer, based on Scripture and their experiences. Part of their experiences can be reflection on the nature of prayer as presented by others who have gone ahead in the faith and have provided theological thoughts about prayer.

Prayer begins in faith and is grounded—as Protestant Reformers make clear—in the promises of God. Prayer is commanded by God with the promised assurance that God hears and answers prayer. A key text in the book of Psalms is God’s promise: “Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Ps. 50:15). This promise is fulfilled in the experience of Christian believers. Since we “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7) we express our prayers in faith, living according to God’s promise—a promise that stands before us for our ultimate salvation (see Heb. 11:13). It also stands before us as a promise of prayer, every day. As one biblical commentator put it: “Each person’s action is guided by a promise concerning the future at a time when it is impossible to see the outcome, so that they can only act in faith.”¹ As the saying goes, “Faith is seeing light with your heart when all your eyes see is darkness.” In faith, we converse with God in prayer, trusting and believing God hears and will act for our good—even when the circumstances of life around us seem dark or perhaps hopeless. Prayer is our “sure persuasion” (see page 23) and brings us, as one of the Reformers put it, “the greatest comfort in the world” (see page 66).

My thanks again go to the fine folks at P&R Publishing for their interest and splendid help with this project. Dave Almack

1. Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 111.

has been a great guide. Amanda Martin has been a helpful and very competent supporter, and Emily Hoeksema always provides useful suggestions. I would also like to thank my friend, Bryce Craig, president of P&R Publishing, for his support of these projects.

This book is dedicated to three friends with whom I have enjoyed many conversations in different places.

George Barnes has been my frequent lunch companion and comrade at a number of Memphis Redbirds baseball games. George and I have stimulating conversations about faith, baseball, and much else. He expresses his faith in his words and actions.

Buzzy Boehme has sat beside LindaJo and me at Memphis Grizzlies basketball games for many years. We share interesting conversations about many things, and it is always a delight to be with Buzzy. His Christian commitment is deep.

David McClenahan, a fellow member of the Board of Directors of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, shares with me a mutual love of Pittsburgh Pirates' baseball. It is always a joy to share board meeting times together; I very much appreciate Dave's Christian convictions and commitment to the Seminary and the church.

My deep joys, as ever, extend to my family. LindaJo and I have shared love and many years of marriage. Her continuing love and support through all life and our experiences is pure grace, for which I am grateful—ever—to her and to God. Our sons and their families are our great blessings and God's wonderful gifts to us: Stephen and Caroline with our grandchildren, Maddie, Annie, and Jack; and Karl and Lauren. They bless us in so many ways, for which we give greatest praise and thanks to God.

My hope is that this book will introduce readers to Protestant Reformers who have important theological and practical things to say about prayer. Their insights can nurture and bless

PREFACE

our faith as we are people of prayer who call on God in petition and give thanks to the One from whom all blessings flow. May our faith be strengthened and our devotion deepened, and may we find of God that, through prayer, “in your presence there is fullness of joy” (Ps. 16:11)!

USING THIS BOOK

THIS book introduces reflections of Protestant Reformers on Christian prayer. Quotations from the Reformers are drawn from various primary and some secondary sources. This book seeks to present Reformers' understandings of prayer and how these can nourish our Christian faith today. This book can be used for individual devotional reading as well as with groups.

The format of each devotion is the same. A Scripture passage is provided for initial reading. The context and emphases of the passage are mentioned in the text of the devotion. The order of the devotions in the book follows the biblical or canonical order of these Scripture passages. Some prayers of the Reformers are also presented in the book.

The comments of the Reformers on prayer are provided, and reflections on their meaning and importance for contemporary Christians who pray are described.

Each devotion ends with either a prayer point or a reflection question. Prayer points suggest ways that readers can incorporate that devotion's insights into their own prayers. Reflection questions suggest further dimensions to what has been described, for reflection or group discussion.

I recommend the following approach:

1. *Read.* Read the Scripture passage at the top of each devotion. You can meditate on this Scripture before reading the devotion and keep it in mind as you read

- the devotion. Each devotion is compact; every sentence is important. Contemplate each sentence as you read it.
2. *Meditate.* After reading the devotion, meditate on its instruction, asking questions such as the following:
 - What has the Reformer conveyed here in the comments on prayer?
 - In what ways can the church's life of prayer be deepened by the Reformer's insights?
 - What do the Reformer's observations mean for my life of prayer?
 - What new directions for prayer does this devotional call me to understand?
 - What ongoing changes in the practices of my prayer life are pointed to by the Reformer's words?
 3. *Pray.* Whether or not a specific prayer point appears at the end of the devotion, spend time in prayer reflecting on the Scripture passage, the Reformer's insights, and the comments in the devotion. Incorporate all your experience in your conversation with God in prayer.
 4. *Act.* These insights about prayer may lead you to move into new directions or act in new ways in your life. Be open to the new dimensions of Christian living to which your prayers move you.

The title of each devotion expresses a main point of the devotion. As you read and reread these titles, recall what the devotion says and means to you.

If you keep a journal, incorporate insights about your encounter with prayer daily or at special times in the week. If you keep a prayer list, expand this to include what God's Spirit tells you through your devotional readings. These materials may be reviewed later and appropriated again for your life.

The devotions of the Protestant Reformers and their prayers can be read daily or upon occasion. I entrust this book to God's

providence and the work of the Holy Spirit to be read and received in your life—whenever and wherever you read the devotions. When you use the devotions, use them prayerfully and in anticipation that God can—and will!—speak to you through them.

In some instances, I have modified quotations or provided definitions of archaic terms to enhance our understandings today. Citations are provided at the end of the book, indexed by author name and page number. Selected resources for further reflections are also provided to enable additional study of the Protestant Reformers.



ALMIGHTY, eternal and merciful God, whose Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, open and illuminate our minds, that we may purely and perfectly understand your Word and that our lives may be conformed to what we have rightly understood, that in nothing we may be displeasing to your majesty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HULDRYCH ZWINGLI



GOD'S SURE AND INFALLIBLE PROMISES

Joshua 21:43-45

GOD is “the author of all goodness,” said Heinrich Bullinger. He said we can “ask that of him which we know we want; but yet of him certainly to be received.” For, said Bullinger, “we believe his sure and infallible promises.”

God’s goodness is the source of our confidence in praying. God will convey divine blessings upon us. We ask of God what we know we want and what we believe we will certainly receive. God’s Word and will can be trusted. God’s promises are “sure and infallible.” They will be fulfilled. God’s Word is certain and will not lead us astray. This is the God to whom we can pray.

The people of Israel found this in very specific ways. In receiving the land God had promised, the people of Israel found that “not one of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass” (Josh. 21:45).

God is a God who keeps promises. In prayer, we acknowledge what God has promised and ask God to meet our needs, according to the divine will. Because God is good, we have confidence that our prayers will be heard. God’s “sure and infallible promises” provide our confidence in praying. God will act in accordance with who God is—“the author of all goodness.”

Have confidence in God’s goodness. Pray, believing that God will surely fulfill all God’s promises for you!

REFLECTION QUESTION: Reflect on what promises of God are most important for you right now. In what ways do you ask God to fulfill these promises in your life?

THE CRY OF THE HEART

1 Samuel 1:9–18

WHEN we call upon God, we speak aloud or pray silently. Both are important. Most important is that our prayers proceed from the depths of our hearts. Prayers must be heartfelt to be offered honestly to the Lord.

Archbishop James Ussher pointed to this when he reflected on Hannah, who became the mother of Samuel. She wanted a child desperately and began to pray (see 1 Sam. 1:10). Eli, the priest, saw Hannah's lips moving, "but her voice was not heard" (v. 13). Ussher wrote, "What do you mean by calling upon God? Not the calling of the tongue, but the cry of the heart: as Hannah called upon God, when her voice was not heard (1 Sam. 1:13). . . . What gather you hence? That the heart without the tongue, may pray with fruit and feeling: (1 Sam. 1:10) but the tongue without the heart is nothing but vain babbling"—referring to Jesus's words about those who "heap up empty phrases" in their prayers (Matt. 6:7).

Hannah's prayer was a cry of the heart. She wanted a child urgently and poured out her heart to God. Her anguish was so deep that she did not speak. But her heart was speaking to God, petitioning God to answer her prayer. God did answer her prayer, and Samuel was born.

Jesus warned about prayers that are "just words." Our prayers must be cries from our hearts. Freely and honestly, we express our deepest desires to God who knows our hearts.

PRAYER POINT: Pray to God out loud and then silently. In both forms of expression, look within your heart to express what matters most to you and what you deeply desire.

LONGING FOR GOD'S PROMISES

2 Samuel 7:16–29

GOD established a covenant with King David. This was of God's pure grace. It was a gift given to David and his posterity. God promised David, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16).

In response, David prayed, "Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have wrought all this greatness, so that your servant may know it" (v. 21). David signaled his assent and prayed, "Confirm it forever; do as you have promised" (v. 25). David prayed in acknowledgment of God's promise: "O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant" (v. 28).

This promise to David shows that God is a God of promises, as we see throughout the Scriptures. These are promises to all of us. They are expressions of God's goodness, help, and ultimately, salvation. When we pray, we look to God's promises. The Reformer William Tyndale said simply, "Prayer is the longing for God's promises."

God is faithful and will keep all God's promises. As we pray, we desire and long for God's promises given to all—and, especially, given to us. Martin Luther is credited with saying that prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of God's willingness. God gives promises. In prayer, we long to receive God's loving promises . . . to us!

PRAYER POINT: Think of promises of Scripture that are meaningful to you. Go through them and pray that you may receive these promises as God intends.