

# ***Classic Prayers and Guidance for Bible Study***

***Workplace Faith Booklet #2***

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*"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven".*

*Matthew 5:13-16 NKJV*

***The following prayers and guidance for Bible study appear in Holy Living (HL), by Jeremy Taylor, 1650, The Christian Directory, by Richard Baxter, and the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), 1959 and 1918 (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1552). They are intended to assist both leaders and participants in Bible study. J.I. Packer offers some concise suggestions as well, in his book Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life, 1998. Meal breaks at work are good times for Bible study and to encourage one another by study, prayer and conversation.***

***[Refer also to Being Salt and Light in the Workplace: A Manual of Classic Guidelines and Prayers; and Classic Prayers for the Employed -- at [www.ccri.ca](http://www.ccri.ca)]***

# *Classic Prayers and Guidance for Bible Study*

## *Prayers before reading scripture or leading Bible Study*

*Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life. BCP*

*God, who at (Pentecost) didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore rejoice in his holy comfort. BCP*

### ***Prayer for holy intention in the beginning and pursuit of any considerable action, as Study, Preaching, etc.***

*O eternal God, who has made all things for man, and man for Thy glory, sanctify my body and soul, my thoughts and my intentions, my words and actions, that whatsoever I shall think, or speak, or do, may be by me designed to the glorification of Thy name; and by Thy blessing it may be effective and successful in the work of God, according as it can be capable. Lord, turn my necessities into virtue; the works of nature into the works of grace, by making them orderly, regular, temperate, subordinate, and profitable to ends beyond their own proper efficacy; and let no pride or self-seeking, no covetousness or revenge, no impure mixture or unhandsome purposes, no little ends and low imaginations pollute my spirit, and unhallow any of my words and actions: but let my body be a servant of my spirit, and both body and spirit be servants of Jesus: that doing all things for Thy glory here, I may be partaker of Thy glory hereafter; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. HL*

The most common faith groups at work concern Bible study. The following guides concern the reading and hearing of the Word, and discussion of spiritual books and sermons. Taylor's nine points are followed by Richard Baxter's advice for putting the message into practice.<sup>1</sup> It will be noted that both Taylor and Baxter place great priority on not only daily listening to scripture, but also to understanding it and putting into practice. Among the preliminaries to such active and effective listening is the understanding of our special weaknesses and sins, and commitment to overcoming

them by means of the Biblical guidance, rightly understood. Packer contrasts Baxter's disciplined approach to listening to sermons, to the present laxity, and his comments also apply to the effort we put into our Bible study at work: "Baxter's discipline of expecting, focusing, memorizing (writing notes if need be), discussing, praying and applying is at the opposite extreme of our modern habit of relaxing at sermon time, settling back on our seats to see if the preacher's performance will interest and entertain us, and if anything he says will particularly strike us – and if not, then to forget the sermon and to say if asked that we got nothing out of it."<sup>2</sup>

### ***Rules for hearing or reading the Word of God.***

*1. Set apart some portion of thy time, according to the opportunities of thy calling and necessary employment, for the reading of Holy Scriptures; and, if it be possible, every day read or hear some of it read: you are sure that book teaches all truth, commands all holiness, and promises all happiness.*

*2. When it is in your power to choose, accustom yourself to such portions which are most plain and certain duty, and which contain the story of the life and death of our blessed Saviour. Read the gospels, the Psalms of David, and especially those portions of Scripture which, by the wisdom of the church, are appointed to be publicly read upon Sundays and holy days, viz. the epistles and gospels. In the choice of any other portions, you may advise with a spiritual guide, that you may spend your time with most profit.*

*3. Fail not diligently to attend to the reading of Holy Scriptures upon those days wherein it is most publicly and solemnly read in churches, for at such times, besides the learning our duty, we obtain a blessing along with it, it becoming to us, upon those days a part of the solemn divine worship.*

*4. When the word of God is read or preached to you, be sure you be of a ready heart and mind, free from worldly cares and thoughts, diligent to hear, careful to mark, studious to remember, and desirous to practise all that is commanded, and to live according to it; do not hear for any other end but to become better in our life, and to be instructed in every good work, and to increase in the love and service of God.*

5. *Beg of God, by prayer, that he would give you the spirit of obedience and profit, and that he would, by his Spirit, write the word in your heart, and that you describe it in your life: to which purpose serve yourself of some affectionate ejaculations to that purpose before and after this duty.*

**Concerning Spiritual Books and Ordinary Sermons, take in these Advices also.**

6. *Let not a prejudice to any man's person hinder thee from receiving good by his doctrine, if it be according to godliness; but (if occasion offer it, or especially to godliness; but (if occasion offer it, or especially if duty present it to thee- that is if it be preached in that assembly where thou art bound to be present) accept the word preached as a message from God, and the minister as his angel in that ministration.*

7. *Consider and remark the doctrine that is represented to thee in any discourse; and if the preacher adds accidental advantages, anything to comply with thy weakness, or to put thy spirit into action or holy resolution, remember it and make use of it. But if the preacher be a weak person, yet the text is the doctrine, thou art to remember, that contains all thy duty; it is worth thy attendance to hear that spoken often and renewed upon thy thoughts; and though thou beest a learned man, yet the same things which thou knowest already, if spoken by another, may be made active by that application. I can better be comforted by my own considerations if another hand applies them than if I do it myself; because the word of God does not work as a natural agent, but as a divine instrument; it does not prevail by the force of deduction and artificial discoursings only, but chiefly by way of blessing in the ordinance and in the ministry of an appointed person. At least obey the public order, and reverence the constitution, and give good example of humility, charity, and obedience.*

8. *When Scriptures are read, you are only to inquire, with diligence and modesty, into the meaning of the Spirit; but if homilies or sermons be made upon the words of Scripture, you are to consider, whether all that be spoken be conforming to the Scriptures; for although you may practise for human reasons and human arguments ministered from the preacher's art, yet you must practise nothing but the command of God, nothing but the doctrine of Scripture; that is, the text.*

*9. Use the advice of some spiritual or other prudent man for the choice of such spiritual books, which may be of use and benefit for the edification of thy spirit in the ways of holy living; and esteem that time well accounted for that is prudently and affectionately employed in hearing or reading good books and pious discourses; ever remembering, that God, by hearing us speak to him in prayer, obliges us to hear him speak to us in his word, by what instrument soever it be conveyed. HL*

Some of Baxter's directions to put into practice what we hear, are listed by Packer:

- I. Be acquainted with the failings of your hearts and lives, and come on purpose to get directions and helps against those particular failings ... say when you go out of doors, I go to Christ for physic for my own disease ... .*
  
- IV. When you come home, let conscience in secret ... repeat the sermon to you. Between God and yourselves, consider what was delivered to you in the Lord's message, that your souls were most concerned in.*
  
- V. Hear the most practical preachers you can well get ... that are still [constantly] urging you to holiness of heart and life, and driving home every truth to practice. ...*
  
- VII. Associate yourselves with the most holy, serious, practical Christians. ...*
  
- VIII. Keep a just account of your practice; examine yourselves in the end of every day and week. ... Call yourselves to account every hour, what you are doing and how you do it ... and your hearts must be watched and followed like unfaithful servants, and like loitering scholars [schoolchildren], and driven on to every duty, like a dull or tired horse.*
  
- IX. Above all set your hearts to the deepest contemplations of the wonderful love of God in Christ, and the sweetness and excellency of a holy life, and the ... glory which it tendeth to, that your souls may be in love with your dear Redeemer, and all is holy, and love and obedience may be as natural to you. And then the practice of holy doctrine will be easy to you, when it is your delight.*

Packer's guidance on interpreting scripture is summarized in Chapter 4. "Give Me Understanding: The Approach to Biblical Interpretation". He provides the following "Rules of interpretation" that might be helpful for Bible study leaders:

*"There are basically three rules of interpretation. First, interpret Scripture historically, in terms of what each writer meant his own first readers to gather from his words. This means seeing each book in its own historical and cultural setting and putting ourselves in both the writer's and the readers' shoes. ... The way into the mind of the Holy Spirit is through the meaning expressed by those whose thoughts and words the Spirit inspired.*

*"Secondly, interpret Scripture organically, as a complex unity proceeding from one mind, that of God the Spirit, the primary author ... . Holy Scripture is a library of great literary diversity to which more than forty writers contributed over more than a thousand years. They too, however, express one mind, the mind of their divine source. This appears from the demonstrable fact that they tell one story about God, one Saviour, one covenant and one church, and teach one way of serving God, the way of faith, hope and love, of repentance, obedience, praise, prayer, work and joy. ...*

*"Third, interpret scripture practically, ... -- seeking always the word God addresses to you, here and now, to prompt your response to him. In Bible studies we start as flies on the wall, watching God deal with people of the past, overhearing his words to them and theirs to him, noting the outcome of their faithful and faithless living. But then we realize that the God whom we are watching is watching us, that we too are wholly in his hands and that we are no less called and claimed to him than were the Bible characters. ... Having seen what the text meant for its writer and first readers, we now see what it means for us. We study Scripture in the presence of the living God, as those who stand under both it and him. Each time it is as if he handed us a letter from himself and stays with us while we read it to hear what our answer will be. To have this awareness, and to pray 'Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law,' and then to read Scripture (or hear it preached or read expositions of it) expecting Father, Son and Spirit to meet, teach, question, challenge, humble, heal, forgive, strengthen and restore you as you do so, is the crucial step in interpretation, to which historical and organic study are the preliminaries. ... John Wesley formulated it thus:*

*I am a creature of a day ... I want to know one thing, the way to heaven. ... God himself has condescended to teach the way. ... He has written it down in a book. O give me that book: At any price give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. ... I sit down alone: only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. ... Does anything appear dark and intricate: I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights. ... I then search after and consider parallel passages. ... I meditate thereon. ... If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God: and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, I teach.*

*“Apart from the seeming narrowness of the phrase “the way to heaven,” which could divert concern for creative work for God on earth (though it did not so divert Wesley himself!), you could hardly spell it out more right-mindedly than that.” pp. 107-9.*

Perhaps the greatest pressure one faces in the workplace besides relaxing one’s faith and commitment is to relax one’s view of Biblical truth. In *Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life*, Packer claims that Biblical truth is under attack even in evangelical circles.<sup>3</sup> He strongly affirms Biblical truth and provides the following statement on Biblical truth taken from the report of the *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy*, 1978.

- 1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God’s witness to Himself.*
- 2. Holy Scripture, being God’s own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed as God’s instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God’s command, in all it requires; embraced, as God’s pledge, in all that it promises.*
- 3. The Holy Spirit, its divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.*
- 4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in*

*creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.*

5. *The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.*

Fundamental to both Bible Study, prayer and our work life is God's presence, and Jeremy Taylor provides the following guidelines, as expressed by Hinton.<sup>4</sup>

1. *When you begin to pray, place yourself in God's presence and let your desires actually fix on Him. Then the rest of your prayers will more likely be wise.*
2. *Let everything you see represent God's presence, excellency, and power. In the face of the sun you may see God's beauty; in the fire you may feel His warmth; in the water you may feel His gentle refreshment.*
3. *Have frequent dialogues between God and your soul, as David did: "Seven times a day I praise you" (Ps. 119:164 NIV). Every act of thanksgiving, rejoicing or mourning to God builds Him a chapel in our hearts. ... Even in the middle of your occupation you may worship in your heart-chapel.*
4. *As God is in us we are in Him. We are His craftsmanship; let us not deface it. We are in His presence; let us not pollute it with unholy actions.*

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer, *Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life*, Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, 1999 (1996) pp. 137-8. Baxter's points are found in his *Christian Directory*, 1673 (23 years after Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*). Packer also presents Baxter's directions for understanding the Word, for understanding what you hear, and for Holy Resolutions and affections on hearing the Word.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, *op. cit.* The history of the assault on truth is found in Chapter 3. "A Long War: Fifty Years Battling for the Bible", and the statement on inerrancy appears in the appendix to this chapter, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> Marvin D. Hinton, *The Search for Holy Living*, Barbour: Uhrichsville, 1999, pp. 148-9.