

## True Prayer

By Joline Stewart. Thoughts from the article "Praying in the Spirit" by John Bunyan, which was written from Bedford Jail.

John Bunyan (circa 1628-1688) was an English writer and preacher associated with a Puritan Nonconformist group at St. John's Church. He was imprisoned for his opposition to the restrictions of religious freedom and the Book of Common Prayer. The Book of Common Prayer reduced praying to the verbal repetition of prewritten prayers.

Bunyan, the author of the famous allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*, chose time in jail rather than to renege on his personal conviction that prayer must be the spontaneous utterance of the heart. He insisted that prayer must be the very wrestling of the soul with Almighty God. He believed that true prayer is praying in the Spirit and therefore much more than mere words. *I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also (1 Cor. 14:15 KJV).*

He believed that prayer brings those who seek God into great familiarity with Him. It obtains great things from God for the person that prays and for the object of their prayers. Prayer opens the heart of God and fills the empty soul of the one praying. By prayer the Christian opens his heart to God and finds a true friend in God.

Bunyan distinguished between true prayer, praying with the Spirit, and merely voicing thoughts. In agreement with C. H. Spurgeon, he insisted that it is a spiritual business from start to finish, empowered by the Holy Spirit within. He stressed the importance of prayer lining up with scripture. Daniel Henderson in his book entitled *Transforming Prayer*, describes prayer as Spirit-led, Scripture-fed, and worship-based. Prayer is most effective when accompanied by an attitude of submission to the will of God and to the Word of God.



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