

Why I Love the Book of Common Prayer

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If you had to live the rest of your life with only the Bible and one other book, what would that book be? For me there is no need to ponder, the only book I could ever choose is the *Book of Common Prayer*. I know and love people of many denominations and



backgrounds, and I know some of you are curious about the *Book of Common Prayer* and the form of worship used by the Anglican Orthodox Church. Some of you don't like the Prayer Book. To you it seems rigid and sterile; an empty ritual rather than heart-felt worship. Some of you are at the other end of the issue. You are in churches

characterised by contemporary worship, and you find their worship barren and empty; all about people instead of all about God. You want to know if the Prayer Book has anything more to offer. So, I am going to try to express why I use and love the *Book of Common Prayer*.

I confess; I love the Prayer Book. I love the Biblical truth of its prayers. I love the way they express the desires of my heart and the deep teachings of the Scriptures. I find no extemporaneous prayer of confession as full and Biblical as the General Confession in the service of Holy Communion; "We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness... Against thy Divine Majesty, We do earnestly repent. The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; The burden of them is intolerable." I know of nothing to ease the sinner's fears better than the Absolution and "comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all who truly turn to Him." The Prayers and liturgies of the Prayer Book are not novelties, they are the essence of Biblical faith drawn together by the greatest minds of the Church and hallowed by the loving use of generations of faithful people. Its words and forms come from the Bible, the Apostles, and from Christ Himself. The Prayer Book truly is the Bible in devotional form.

Every day I love the Prayer Book more. On days when my faith is weak and prayer is difficult, the Prayer Book leads me to the throne of grace. On days when my thoughts are clouded by care and sorrow, the Prayer Book leads me to the throne of grace. On days when I am close to God and rejoice to seek and praise Him, the Prayer Book leads me to the throne of grace. In each and every situation the Prayer Book leads my heart to worship God in Spirit and in truth because the Prayer Book prays the Bible. The more I use it, pray it, and worship by it, the more I love it.

Any serious reading of the Bible shows worship characterised by reverence and awe. There is joy and feeling in worship, but always combined with reverence. It never has a party or entertainment feel to it. Biblical worship is so much like the rest of the Christian life that it is almost like a portrait of it, for it captures and expresses the essence of following Christ. It never calls God to change to accommodate our likes or tastes or values. It always calls us to change to accommodate His. It never calls God to please us; it always calls us to please Him. The Prayer Book leads us into those things that please God. I love the Prayer Book because it is Biblical. I love the Prayer Book because I know when I have worshiped by its prayers and liturgies I have worshiped God as He wants to be worshiped. I love the Prayer Book because the Prayer Book is not about me, it is about God.



It is my desire to help you love it too, and to love it more and more each day and week. I hope that as you continue to grow in Biblical faith, and in the knowledge of Biblical teachings, you will grow to love the way the Prayer Book expresses the Bible in prayer and worship. In other words, my hope is that you will love God more and worship Him more fully through the Prayer Book. The Prayer Book leads us into the Bible, and the Bible leads us into God.

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Jan Karon's Mitford books are runaway best sellers. What makes her books unique is that they tell the story of a small town minister and his work among the people of the fictional town of Mitford, North Carolina. According to a reviewer, the books are "filled to the brim with the mysteries and miracles that make everyday life worth living." The minister's name is Timothy Kavanagh, rector of Lord's Chapel, and aside from the humor and plot of the books, the most outstanding thing about Rev. Kavanagh is his orthodoxy. He believes, teaches, and lives the Bible. No new doctrines or practices appear in his church, simply the old, old story of salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

A second notable feature of the books is the beautiful liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer*. In *Out to Canaan* Ms. Karon recounts a worship service according to this liturgy. The people of Mitford, like real people, have faced their trials and sorrows, as well as their blessing and joys of life. The writer gives some of their thoughts and feelings as they unite their hearts and voices in the service. "She felt the words enter her aching [soul] like balm." "He found the words of the prayer beautiful. They made him feel hopeful and closer to the Lord." Deeply moved by the prayers, one lady is "unable to keep the tears back," while another rejoices "at how she'd come to be kneeling in this place." Still another, feeling strengthened by God in answer to the prayers, begins to feel she may be able to live more of fully the life of faith in Christ. As the prayers continue

the rector feels his spirit moved toward the people, who also feel moved toward one another and toward God. Their sense of having been drawn into God is expressed profoundly and simply; "Amen!" they said in unison."

While the worship and worshipers in this event are fictional, they must convey something of the author's thoughts and feelings about the Prayer Book. They certainly convey mine. Like her characters, the words enter my soul like balm. I find them beautiful and moving. I find them drawing me closer to God and strengthening me for the Christian life. My heart is moved toward the congregation, as I hope the congregation is moved toward me, and, together, we are all drawn into the loving wonder of God.

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The *Book of Common Prayer* has literally led millions of people into Biblical faith and worship. Its annual cycle of prayer and Bible readings, leads us into the deep things of God in an orderly way that deepens our understanding and faith.

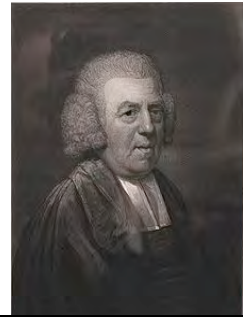
The Prayer Book also helps us avoid errors in faith and practice. Rather than abandoning us to find our way through the Bible alone, the prayers and readings guide us into the Word and

establish us in the faith once delivered to the saints. All people have a tendency to go astray. This is as true in matters of doctrine and worship as it is in morality, and many have fallen into error by following their own imaginations or the ever changing trends of pop church. The Prayer Book keeps us grounded in the truth by guiding our thoughts and our worship into that taught in the Bible and believed by the Church from the beginning.

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The primary question about any form of worship is; is it Biblical? In regard to the Prayer Book, the answer is a resounding, "Yes!" One of the first things people notice about the Prayer Book liturgies is the abundance of Scripture in them. There are at least three readings from the Bible at every service, and almost every word of the service comes from the Bible through direct quotations, indirect quotations, or paraphrases. The Prayer Book contains so much Bible it has been called the Bible in devotional form. To ask, "Is it Biblical?" however, means primarily, "Is it in accordance with the *meaning* and *intent*

of the Bible?" Again, the answer is a resounding, "Yes!" The Prayer Book expresses the faith and message of the Bible. The ideas and doctrines found in it are those found in the Bible itself.



**John Newton
(1725-1807)
Anglican Minister,
author of
"Amazing Grace"**

Equally important, the Prayer Book continues to worship as Christ and the early Church worshiped. Any un-biased reading of the Bible shows that the New Testament Church worshiped liturgically. The first Christians were Jews, nurtured in the liturgy of the Temple and Synagogue for generations upon generations. When the New Testament Church began to meet apart from the Temple and Synagogue, it took the Jewish pattern and liturgy with it. In essence, the early Church was a "Christian" Synagogue.



This has serious ramifications for those who say they believe the Bible, and want to follow it in all things. The worship of the Bible is liturgical. It is not spontaneous, extemporaneous, or left to the imaginations and creativity of people. To transform it from liturgical to spontaneous is to turn it from the adoration of God to the enhancement of man, and from serving God to pleasing people. An objective look at current trends in worship confirms that this is exactly what is happening in the contemporary church. The music, the architecture, and the mode of dress are becoming increasingly preoccupied with "reaching people" rather than reaching God.

By contrast, the Bible places people in the background and makes worship all about God. The Prayer Book follows the Bible.

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In 1549 England was steeped in paganism and superstition. Officially a "Christian nation" Henry VIII typifies the darkness that pervaded the land. Many people were truly Christian believers, but most were Christian in name only. Living their lives in ignorance of and indifference to the essence of the Christian faith, they knew neither Christian doctrine nor Christian worship.



The Bible came into this darkness as light from Heaven. The Reformation was a rediscovery of the Bible, and a return to the Bible as the authority for faith and practice. It was a Great Awakening, turning the hearts of thousands to Christ. The Bible was translated into English, a feat accomplished by much sacrifice, suffering, and death. Its culmination is the great Authorised Version, known today

as the King James Version.

The Book of Common Prayer greatly aided England's return to Biblical Christianity. It swept away generations of accumulated errors and pomp, and it restored worship to its Biblical purity. Its liturgies led people into the essence of Biblical faith daily through



Morning and Evening Prayer. It put the Bible back into the hands of the people through its cycle of prayer and daily Scripture readings. It accomplished these things not by creating novel ideas and practices, but by returning to the faith and worship of the New Testament. The Prayer Book reached back into 1500 years of Christian worship, removed layers of accumulation, and led the people back to the Bible.

Western culture today faces a situation very similar to that of England and Europe prior to the Reformation. Our culture is sinking back into the morass of paganism. Christian values are ridiculed, and Christian people are being constantly exposed to pagan ideas and values. Consequently, Christians are becoming paganised. We have reached the point where most Christians no longer know what the Bible says about doctrine, values, morality, or worship. We need another Great Awakening. We need another Reformation. We need to have our ideas, values, and theology reformed by the Bible. Just as the Prayer Book helped lead our ancestors back to the Bible, it can help lead the contemporary Church back too, if we let it.

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One of the things I love about the Prayer Book is the sense of historical connection it fosters. In its pages I walk and pray with those who have walked and prayed before me. The *Book of Common Prayer* was first published in English in 1549, but its pages did not produce a new way of worship. Its forms and words have guided the Church through the ages, from the time of Christ to this very moment. In the Prayer Book I am connected to the Apostles and early Church, the Coliseum, the catacombs, and the Councils. I am walking in the footprints of Paul, Mary, Peter, Martha, Augustine and Columba. In 1549 the Reformation was making its way to the shores of Britannia, so I know that in the Prayer Book's pages I am connected to those who brought the Reformation to the English speaking people. Many of the Reformers sacrificed their lives to give Biblical faith and worship to us. In the Prayer Book I share their prayers, and even their very words. I walk in the footprints of Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, and Nicholas Ridley.



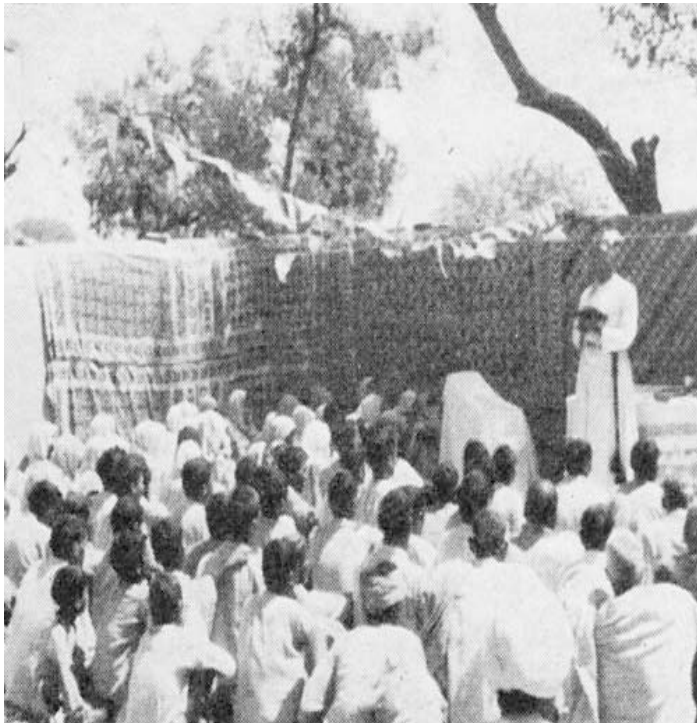
Ancient Ruins in Ephesus

To worship as they worshiped is meaningful, and humbling, but the Prayer Book has been in continuous use for nearly 500 years since then. Millions of people in many nations and many cultures have been gathered into Christ, and said and sung His praise through its prayers and services. The Prayer Book connects me to people of every race and tongue. Many of the most godly saints this world has ever known have sought and found the presence of God as they knelt in worship with the Prayer Book in hand. Most of their names are forgotten here on earth, but I am connected to them in their faith and worship. I know that in the Prayer Book I am connected to the Church in all of history. As



I pray the same prayers and believe the same faith, we, and all who pray with us, make "our common supplications" unto God.

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Anglicans at worship in India, ca. 1900

The goal of every real Christian is to be able to say with St. Paul, "for me, to live is Christ." Most of us will say we have a long way to go before we reach that destination, and that is probably true. It is certainly true that the only sure guide to this destination is the Bible. The Bible alone is the Word of God. In its pages we learn God's heart and meet Him in the Saviour Christ. But the Bible is long and complicated, how can we understand its meaning? The Prayer Book helps. The Prayer Book is a guide to the Bible. The Prayer Book is much like a theology book. A theology book brings the various teachings of Scripture together to make them recognisable and understandable.

The Prayer Book does the same, but where a theology book is intellectual, the Prayer Book is devotional. It puts the Bible's doctrines into prayers we can memorise and call to mind at a moment's notice or need. The constant use of the Prayer Book embeds these doctrines in our soul. It helps them become familiar friends, rather than impersonal facts.

It helps the Bible become part of the way we think, shaping our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. There can be no higher use for a book than this. And, to me, no book accomplishes this as well and completely as *The Book of Common Prayer*. That is why I love the Prayer Book.



Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957)
Author of
Letters to a Diminished Church