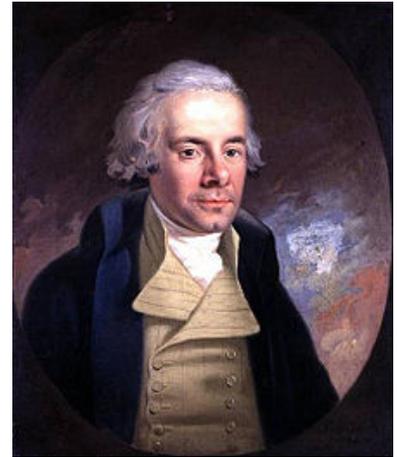


Prayer of the month • July 2013

And now when we are again returned to the day that is consecrated to Thy special service, enable us, we beseech Thee, to welcome its arrival, and to employ it in a manner suited to its high and holy character. May we this day endeavour seriously to consider our ways, and examine our true condition, whether we are travelling in the broad road that leadeth to destruction, or in the narrow way that leadeth to life. Oh, let not self-love deceive us in this important inquiry, and grant us Thy heavenly grace to soften our hearts, that we may feel what it is to offend the God who has every claim to our allegiance and love. May we be convinced not merely of the guilt of our disobedience, but also of the baseness of our ingratitude. May we be filled with a lively sense of Thy goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering. May we delight to call to mind all the various mercies which we have been receiving at Thy hands from the first moment of our existence to the present hour. Above all, may we remember Thine infinite love in sending Thine own Son, the partaker of Thy glory, to die for us men, and for our salvation, in calling us to the knowledge of Thy heavenly truth, and influencing our reluctant hearts, and bearing with our manifold provocations.



From 'Sunday Morning' in *Family Prayers* by William Wilberforce. – 3rd ed. – London : J. Hatchard and Son, 1834. – p.26-27

This prayer, long by present day standards, is a section of a much longer prayer written by William Wilberforce, the philanthropist and advocate of the abolition of the slave trade, and included in the collection *Family Prayers*, edited by his son, Robert, and published in 1834, the year after his father's death. Even without reading the prayer in detail we can see the seriousness of the prayer, and the earnestness of the one praying it. In his preface to the collection, Robert Wilberforce quotes from Archbishop Tillotson some words often quoted by William himself, as to the necessity of daily prayer and Bible reading for Christians, that 'where it is neglected, I do not see how any family can in reason be esteemed a family of Christians, or indeed to have any religion at all.'

'Sunday morning' in this book is a good place to start with prayer, as the prayer invites God to give enlightenment and instruction on this special day. It is a prayer for realism, contrition and humility about oneself, and for gratitude for God's graciousness both in specific personal instances and in the matchless sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Wilberforce has high standards but they are not unattainable.

William Wilberforce was born in Hull in 1759 and educated at St John's College, Cambridge. In 1780 he was elected MP for Hull, and became a highly regarded orator. He became friends with the clergyman, hymn writer, and sometime slaver, John Newton. Newton persuaded him to continue as an MP when Wilberforce felt called to take Holy Orders. He came under the influence of Thomas Clarkson and joined in the campaign against the slave trade, promoting the Bill which eventually became law in 1807. Later, he supported the abolition of slavery itself, and saw the Emancipation Act passed in 1833, shortly before his death. He helped set up the Church Missionary Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), and was a long-term advocate of Sunday observance. In the Church of England calendar his feast day is the day of his death, 30 July.

Colin Lunt