

Prayer of the Month • July/August 2014

O Lord,
reassure me with your quickening Spirit;
without you I can do nothing.
Mortify in me all ambition, vanity, vainglory, worldliness, pride,
selfishness, and resistance from God,
and fill me with love, peace, and all the fruits of the Spirit.
O Lord, I know not what I am, but to you I flee for refuge.
I would surrender myself to you, trusting your precious promises
and against hope believing in hope.
You are the same yesterday, today, and forever;
and therefore, waiting on the Lord,
I trust that I shall at length renew my strength.

William Wilberforce, 1759-1833

This prayer begins with a desire for reassurance. The author wants not feel dependence on God, rather than on himself. He can see the dangers of 'bigging himself up' – personal ambition, vanity and so on put the focus on his concern for himself, necessarily leading him to resist what comes from God. Nature abhors a vacuum and something has to fill this space. Let it be the fruits of the Spirit, not instant but growing. He feels disoriented by all the pressures, the choices. But he can reorient himself in



God's presence, when he submits himself to God, having faith in God's promises and being renewed in hope. He can be renewed in hope and trust in God's eternal changelessness.

We can see the relevance of this prayer for the life that William Wilberforce lived. He overcame the setbacks of his bill for the abolition of the slave trade being rejected time after time. Born in 1759, a turning point in his life came, while, on a tour of Europe with a friend, he came upon William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. He wondered what he should do with his life, and thought about the priesthood but Christian friends convinced him that God would use him best in politics. He entered parliament in 1780 and remained until 1825. His passion against slavery led him to introduce a bill for the abolition of slavery in 1788, with a three-and-a-half hour speech, which concluded: 'Sir, when we think of eternity and the future consequence of all human conduct, what is there in this life that shall make any man contradict the dictates of his conscience, the principles of justice and the law of God!' It was rejected. However, he introduced anti-slavery measures into parliament year after year until, after eighteen years his bill against the slave trade was passed in 1806. He continued to campaign against slavery itself, and the bill for the abolition of all slavery in British territories passed its crucial vote just four days before his death on 29 July 1833. He is commemorated in the Anglican calendar on 30th July, together with anti-slavery campaigners Olaudah Equiano and Thomas Clarkson.

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