

PRAYER IS THE SOUL'S SINCERE DESIRE

(words by **James Montgomery** (1771-1854))

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed;¹
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try;
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.

Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice,
Returning from his ways,
While angels in their songs rejoice,
And cry, "Behold, he prays!"

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air,
His watchword at the gates of death:
He enters heaven with prayer.²

O Thou by whom we come to God,
The life, the truth, the way,
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod:
Lord, teach us how to pray.³

¹ In some hymn books, verse 1 line 2 reads '*Unuttered or expressed*'.

² In verse 5, lines 3 and 4 are respectively altered to '*Our watchword ...*' and '*We enter ...*' in the modern version.

In prayer on earth the saints are one
In word, and deed, and mind,
While with the Father and His Son
Sweet fellowship they find. ⁴

Nor prayer is made on earth alone;
The Holy Spirit pleads;
And Jesus, on the eternal throne,
For sinners intercedes.

REFERENCES:

- Congregational Church in England and Wales, **Congregational Praise**. London: Independent Press Ltd. 1980.
- Richard Watson and Kenneth Trickett (editors), **Companion to Hymns & Psalms**. Peterborough, England: Methodist Publishing House. 1988.
- **Hymns and Psalms**. Peterborough, England: Methodist Publishing House. 2004.
- Gabriel C. S. Chi (editor). **New Songs of Praise**. Hong Kong: Baptist Press. 1976.
- The Cyber Hymnal. **PRAYER IS THE SOUL'S SINCERE DESIRE**. available at <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/p/r/prayeris.htm>

³ Verse 6 is sometimes repeated at the beginning (e.g. in the hymn book *Congregational Praise*) so that the hymn begins with a divine invocation instead of with a series of statements about prayers.

⁴ The last two verses (7 and 8) of the original are omitted in most hymn books after the alteration in Edward Bickersteth's *Treatise on Prayer* (1819).