

# Reading the Puritans

Joel R. Beeke

A MEDIEVAL TALMUDIC scholar, R. Isaiah Di Trani (c. 1200–1260), once asked, “Who can see farther, a giant or a dwarf?”

The answer was, “Surely the giant, because his eyes are higher than those of the dwarf.”

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John Calvin (1509–1564), John Owen (1616–1683), and Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). Amid those giants the Puritans also rise as giants of

exegetical ability, intellectual achievement, and profound piety.

Upon this mountain our Reformed “city” is built. We are where we are because of our history, though we are dwarves on the shoulders of giants. Who would George Whitefield (1714–1770), Charles Hodge (1797–1878), Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892), Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937), or D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) be if not for their predecessors? Despite this, Puritan studies were sorely neglected until the resurgence of Puritan literature in the late 1950s. Even today, in many evangelical circles, Puritan theology is still marginalized. While the Puritans built palaces, we are comfortable building shacks; where they planted fields, we plant but a few flowers; while they turned over every stone in theological reflection, we are content with pebbles; where they aimed for comprehensive depth, we aim for catchy sound bites.

The Latin phrase *tolle lege*, meaning “pick up and read,” offers a remedy for this apathy toward spiritual truth. Our ancestors have left us a rich theological and cultural heritage. We can say of the Puritans what Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) said of his evening routine of reading the ancients, “I enter the ancient courts of rulers who have long since died. There I am warmly welcomed, and I

feed on the only food I find nourishing.”<sup>2</sup>

Returning to Puritan writings will also reward a diligent reader. Whitefield said, “Though dead, by their writings they yet speak: a peculiar unc-tion attends them to this very hour.”<sup>3</sup> Whitefield predicted that Puritan writings would be read until the end of time due to their scriptural truth. Spurgeon agreed, saying, “In these [writings] they do live forever. Modern interpreters have not superseded them, nor will they altogether be superseded to the end of time.”<sup>4</sup> Today we are witnessing a revival of sorts in reading the Puritans. Initiated largely by the Banner of Truth Trust, which has been systematically and carefully publishing Puritan literature since the late 1950s,<sup>5</sup> Puritan reprints in the last fifty years now include 150 Puritan authors and seven hundred Puritan titles printed by more than seventy-five publishers.<sup>6</sup> Reformation Heritage Books (RHB) alone—of which the Puritan line of Soli Deo Gloria is an imprint—carries approximately 150 Puritan titles and also sells at discount prices close to five hundred Puritan titles that are currently in print.

We are grateful for this resurgence of interest in Puritan writings. However, this resurgence faces some challenges and poses some questions which I will address in this article. I wish to address five points. First, I will point out several ways of how to benefit by reading the Puritans. Second, I will consider some ideas on how to begin reading the Puritans, and then, third, look at a reading plan for the writings of an individual Puritan, Thomas Goodwin. Fourth, I will look at some of my favorite Puritans, and finally, I will consider some ideas for printing more Puritan books in the future.

## HOW TO PROFIT FROM READING THE PURITANS

Here are nine ways you can grow spiritually by reading Puritan literature today: (1) *Puritan writings help shape life by Scripture*. The Puritans loved, lived, and breathed Holy Scripture. They also relished the power of the Spirit that accompanied the Word. Rarely can you open a Puritan book and

not find its pages filled with Scripture references; their books are all Word-centered. More than 90 percent of their writings are repackaged sermons rich with scriptural exposition. The Puritan writers truly believed in the sufficiency of Scripture for life and godliness.

If you read the Puritans regularly, their Bible-centeredness will become contagious. These writings will teach you to yield wholehearted allegiance to the Bible’s message. Like the Puritans, you will become a believer of the Living Book, echoing the truth of John Flavel (1628–1691), who said, “The Scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering, and the most comfortable way of dying.”<sup>7</sup>

(2) *Puritan writings show how to integrate biblical doctrine into daily life*. Cornelis Pronk wrote, “The Puritan’s concern ... was primarily ethical or moral rather than abstractly doctrinal.”<sup>8</sup> The Puritan writings express this emphasis in three ways: First, they *address your mind*. In keeping with the Reformed tradition, the Puritans refused to set mind and heart against each other, but viewed the mind as the palace of faith. William Greenhill (1591–1671) stated, “Ignorance is the mother of all errors.”<sup>9</sup> The Puritans understood that a mindless Christianity fosters a spineless Christianity. An anti-intellectual gospel quickly becomes an empty, formless gospel that never gets beyond catering to felt needs. Puritan literature is a great help for understanding the vital connection between what we believe and how that affects the way we live.

Second, Puritan writings *confront your conscience*. Today many preachers are masterful at avoiding convicting people of sin, whereas the Puritans were masters at convicting us about the heinous nature of our sin against an infinite God. This is amply displayed in Ralph Venning’s (c. 1622–1674) *The Sinfulness of Sin*. For example, Venning wrote, “Sin is the dare of God’s justice, the rape of his mercy, the jeer of his patience, the slight of his power, the contempt of his love.”<sup>10</sup>

The Puritans excelled at exposing specific sins, then asked questions to press home conviction of

those sins. As one Puritan wrote, “We must go with the stick of divine truth and beat every bush behind which a sinner hides, until like Adam who hid, he stands before God in his nakedness.”

Devotional reading should be confrontational as well as comforting. We grow little if our consciences are not pricked daily and directed to Christ. Since we are prone to run for the bushes when we feel threatened, we need daily help to come before the living God, “naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). In this, the Puritans excelled. Owen wrote, “Christ by his death destroying the works of the devil, procuring the Spirit for us, hath so killed sin, as to its reign in believers, that it shall not obtain its end and dominion.... Look on him under the weight of your sins, praying, bleeding, dying; bring him in that condition into thy heart of faith.”<sup>11</sup>

Third, Puritan writers *engage your heart*. They feed the mind with solid biblical substance *and* they move the heart with affectionate warmth. They wrote out of love for God’s Word, love for the glory of God, and love for the soul of readers. They did this because their hearts were touched by God and they, in turn, longed for others to feel and experience salvation. As John Bunyan (1628–1688) exclaimed, “O that they who have heard me speak this day did but see as I do what sin, death, hell, and the curse of God is; and also what the grace, and love, and mercy of God is, through Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

(3) *Puritan writings show how to exalt Christ and see His beauty*. The Puritan Thomas Adams (1583–1652) wrote, “Christ is the sum of the whole Bible, prophesied, typified, prefigured, exhibited, demonstrated, to be found in every leaf, almost in every line, the Scriptures being but as it were the swaddling bands of the child Jesus.”<sup>13</sup>

The Puritans loved Christ and relished His beauty. The best example of this is probably Samuel Rutherford’s (1600–1661) *Letters*, which sing the sweetest canticles of the Savior. To an elder, Rutherford wrote, “Christ, Christ, nothing but

Christ, can cool our love’s burning languor. O thirsty love! Wilt thou set Christ, the well of life, to thy head, and drink thy fill? Drink, and spare not; drink love, and be drunken with Christ!”<sup>14</sup> To another friend, he wrote, “I have a lover Christ, and yet I want love for Him! I have a lovely and desirable Lord, who is love-worthy, and who beggeth my love and heart, and I have nothing to give Him! Dear brother, come further in on Christ, and see a new wonder, and heaven and earth’s wonder of love, sweetness, majesty, and excellency in Him.”<sup>15</sup> If you would know Christ better and love Him more fully, immerse yourself in Puritan literature.

(4) *Puritan writings highlight the Trinitarian character*. The Puritans were driven by a deep sense of the infinite glory of a Triune God. Edmund Calamy (1600–1666) noted this doctrine should “be allowed to be of as great importance in itself and its consequences, as any of our most distinguishing Christian principles.”<sup>16</sup> When the Puritans said in the Shorter Catechism that man’s chief end was to glorify God, they meant the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They took Calvin’s glorious understanding of the unity of the Trinity in the Godhead, and showed how that worked out in electing, redeeming, and sanctifying love and grace in the lives of believers. Owen wrote an entire book on the Christian believer’s distinct communion with each Person in the Godhead—with God as Father, Jesus as Savior, and the Holy Spirit as Comforter. Samuel Rutherford echoed the conviction of many Puritans when he said that he did not know which divine person he loved the most, but he knew that he needed each of them and loved them all. The Puritans teach us how to remain God-centered while being vitally concerned about Christian experience so that we don’t fall into the trap of glorifying experience for its own sake.

(5) *Puritan writings show how to handle trials*. Puritanism grew out of a great struggle between the truth of God’s Word and its enemies. Reformed Christianity was under attack in Eng-

land at the time of the Puritans, much like today. The Puritans were good soldiers in the conflict; they endured great hardships and suffered much. Their lives and writings arm us for battle and encourage us in suffering. The Puritans teach us how affliction is necessary to humble us (Deut 8:2), to teach us what sin is (Zeph 1:12), and to bring us back to God (Hos 5:15).

Much of the comfort the Puritans offer grows out of the very nature of God. Henry Scougal (1650–1678) said of afflicted believers that it comforts them “to remember that an unerring providence doth overrule all their seeming disorders, and makes them all serve to great and glorious designs.”<sup>17</sup> And Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) declared, “Afflictions work for good, as they conform us to Christ. God’s rod is a pencil to draw Christ’s image more lively upon us.”<sup>18</sup>

(6) *Puritan writings describe true spirituality.* The Puritans stressed the spirituality of the law, the spiritual warfare against indwelling sin, the childlike fear of God, the wonder of grace, the art of meditation, the dreadfulness of hell, and the glories of heaven. If you want to live deeply as a Christian, read Oliver Heywood’s *Heart Treasure*. Read the Puritans devotionally, then pray to be like them. Ask questions such as: Am I, like the Puritans, thirsting to glorify the Triune God? Am I motivated by biblical truth and biblical fire? Do I share their view of the vital necessity of conversion and of being clothed with the righteousness of Christ? Do I follow the Puritans as they followed Christ? Does my life savor of true spirituality?

(7) *Puritan writings show how to live by holistic faith.* The Puritans applied every subject they discussed to practical “uses,” which propel a believer into passionate, effective action for Christ’s kingdom. In their daily lives they integrated Christian truth with covenant vision; they knew no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. Their writings can help you live in a way that centers on God. They will help you appreciate God’s gifts and declare everything “holiness to the Lord.”

The Puritans excelled as covenant theologians.

They lived that theology, covenanting themselves, their families, their churches, and their nations to God. Yet they did not fall into the error of “hyper-covenantalism,” in which the covenant of grace became a substitute for personal conversion. They promoted a comprehensive worldview that brought the whole gospel to bear on all of life, striving to bring every action in conformity with Christ, so that believers would mature and grow in faith. The Puritans wrote on practical subjects, such as how to pray, how to develop genuine piety, how to conduct family worship, and how to raise children for Christ. In short, as J. I. Packer noted, they taught how to develop a “rational, resolute, passionate piety [that is] conscientious without becoming obsessive, law-oriented without lapsing into legalism, and expressive of Christian liberty without any shameful lurches into license.”<sup>19</sup>

(8) *Puritan writings teach the primacy of preaching.* William Perkins (1558–1602) explained why preaching is so critical: “Through preaching those who hear are called into the state of grace, and preserved in it.”<sup>20</sup> To the Puritans, preaching was the high point of public worship. “It is no small matter to stand up in the face of a congregation, and deliver a message of salvation or damnation, as from the living God, in the name of our Redeemer,” wrote Richard Baxter (1615–1691).<sup>21</sup>

The Puritans taught that preaching must be expository and didactic, evangelistic and convicting, experiential and applicatory, powerful and plain in its presentation, ever respecting the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. For the Puritans, what transpired on Sabbath mornings and evenings was not merely a pep talk but was an encounter with God by the Spirit through the Word.

(9) *Puritan writings show how to live in two worlds.* The Puritans said we should have heaven in our eye throughout our earthly pilgrimage. They took seriously the New Testament passages that say we must keep the hope of glory before our minds to guide and shape our lives here on earth. They viewed this life as “the gymnasium and dressing room where we are prepared for heaven,”

teaching us that preparation for death is the first step in learning to truly live.<sup>22</sup>

These nine points are reason enough to demonstrate the benefit of reading the Puritans. We live in dark days where it seems the visible church in many areas around the globe, and particularly in the West, is floundering. Waning interest in doctrinal fidelity and a disinterest in holiness prevails in many Christians. The church's ministry has been marginalized or ignored. The Puritans were in many ways ahead of their times. Their books address the problems of our day with a scriptural clarity and zeal that the church desperately needs.

### WHERE TO BEGIN READING THE PURITANS

The sheer amount of Puritan literature being reprinted today and offered online can be intimidating. Furthermore, the number of books written about the Puritans is nearly as vast as the collection of Puritan titles. The Puritan Research Center at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary alone contains three thousand books of primary and secondary sources, plus thousands of articles about the Puritans.<sup>23</sup>

The Puritans were people of their time, and even while much of what they wrote is timeless, we must understand them within their context. They battled the spirit of their age and waged doctrinal debates pertinent to their day and which, at times, seem quite removed from issues of today. Secondary sources help us understand their historical milieu. The goal of this section is to offer bibliographic information that can help you read the Puritans.

The best overall introduction to the worldview of the Puritans is Leland Ryken's *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were*.<sup>24</sup> Other somewhat shorter yet helpful introductions include Peter Lewis's *The Genius of Puritanism* and Erroll Hulse's *Who Are the Puritans? And What Do They Teach?*<sup>25</sup> For basic biographies of the one hundred fifty Puritans that have been reprinted in the last fifty years, together with brief reviews of seven

hundred reprinted Puritan titles, see *Meet the Puritans, with a Guide to Modern Reprints* by Randall J. Pederson and myself.<sup>26</sup> We suggest the best way to use *Meet the Puritans* is to read one biography and reviews of that Puritan writer per day, thus using the book as a kind of daily biographical devotional. For short biographies of more obscure Puritans who have not been reprinted in the last fifty years, see Benjamin Brook (1776–1848), *The Lives of the Puritans*.<sup>27</sup> For brief biographies of most of the Puritans at the Westminster Assembly, see William S. Barker's *Puritan Profiles*.<sup>28</sup> For individual studies of various Puritan divines and aspects of their theology, begin with J. I. Packer's *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, and my *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*.<sup>29</sup>

The Puritans can be difficult to read. Their wording, grammatical structure, and detail can be hard for the contemporary mind to grasp. It is best to read short books from some popular Puritan writers before attempting to read Puritans of more theological profundity, such as Owen and Thomas Goodwin (1600–1679). I recommend beginning with Puritan divines like Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686), John Flavel (1628–1691), and George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673). Watson wrote succinctly, clearly, and simply. His *Art of Divine Contentment*, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, and *The Doctrine of Repentance* are good places to begin.<sup>30</sup>

Flavel, who was pastor at the seaport of Dartmouth, became known as a seaman's preacher. He is one of the simplest Puritans to read. His *Mystery of Providence* is filled with pastoral and comforting counsel.<sup>31</sup> Swinnock showed a special sensitivity to the Scriptures and could explain doctrines with great wisdom and clarity. You might try his *The Fading of the Flesh and The Flourishing of Faith*, recently edited by Stephen Yuille and printed in a contemporary style.<sup>32</sup> Both Flavel and Swinnock have had their entire works published in multivolume sets.<sup>33</sup>

The books of Richard Sibbes and Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) are also a good place to start, especially Sibbes's *The Bruised Reed* and Brooks's

*Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*.<sup>34</sup> You may also benefit from that master of allegory, John Bunyan, though some of his treatises reflect an unexpected intellectual depth from the tinker of Bedford.<sup>35</sup> Then, too, you could move your way through the Banner of Truth's line of Puritan Paperbacks (which is how I began reading the Puritans at age fourteen) or the more recent Pocket Puritans series. Some Puritan titles written by Owen have been abridged by R. J. K. Law and made easier to read. These are good places to start reading the experiential writings of the Puritans.

How to proceed next depends on your particular interest. After becoming acquainted with various styles of Puritan literature, you have a broad spectrum of possibilities to consider. What joys you might have wrestling with Owen's weighty treatments of the glory of Christ, his soul-searching treatise on sin, and his exegetical masterpiece on Hebrews. Or how thrilling it would be to ascend the heights of the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere with Jonathan Edwards, or to plumb the depths of divine attributes with Stephen Charnock (1628–1680). You may probe the redemptive glories of the covenant with John Ball (1585–1640) and Samuel Petto (c. 1624–1711) or be allured by the redemptive doctrines of justification and sanctification with Walter Marshall (1628–1680), Peter van Mastricht (1630–1706), or Robert Traill (1642–1716). You could entrust yourself to a competent guide like Edward Fisher (d. 1655) to bring you safely through the law/gospel distinction or be impressed with the profound but simple writings of Hugh Binning (1627–1653). Prepare to be challenged by the soul-penetrating works of Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) and Matthew Mead (1629–1699) or be instructed by the plain reason of Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646), Richard Baxter (1615–1691), and George Hammond (c. 1620–1705).

Whatever topic you select, you may be sure that the Puritans have addressed it with scriptural precision, vivid illumination, practical benefit, experiential warmth, and an eye to the glory of

God. Many Puritan writings, however, are not for the faint of heart. But the reader who diligently probes Puritan writings with the willingness to gaze under every rock they overturn and prayerfully consider what they say, will be drawn ever more deeply into the revealed mysteries of God. When you follow the writings of these faithful men, you will find that it will be for the betterment of your soul.

## **HOW TO READ AN INDIVIDUAL PURITAN**

There are no rules for reading individual Puritans, but here are some suggestions. Generally speaking, Puritans are best read slowly and meditatively. Don't rush through their books. Look up the texts they cite to prove their points. Intersperse your reading with prayer.

Here are some guidelines for reading Thomas Goodwin, who was, for twenty years, my favorite Puritan writer. The first collection of Goodwin's works was published in five folio volumes in London from 1681 to 1704, under the editorship of Thankful Owen, Thomas Baron, and Thomas Goodwin Jr. An abridged version of those works was later printed in four volumes (London, 1847–50). James Nichol printed a more reliable collection of Goodwin's works in twelve volumes (Edinburgh, 1861–66) in the Nichol's Series of Standard Divines. It is far superior to the original five folio volumes and was reprinted in 2006 by Reformation Heritage Books.

Goodwin's exegesis is massive; he leaves no stone unturned. His first editors (1681) said of his work: "He had a genius to dive into the bottom of points, to 'study them down,' as he used to express it, not contenting himself with superficial knowledge, without wading into the depths of things."<sup>36</sup> Calamy said: "It is evident from his writings [that] he studied not words, but things. His style is plain and familiar; but very diffuse, homely and tedious."<sup>37</sup> One does need patience to read Goodwin; however, along with depth and prolixity, he offers a wonderful sense of warmth

and experience. A reader's patience will be amply rewarded.

Here is a plan for reading Goodwin's works: (1) Begin by reading some of the shorter, more practical writings of Goodwin, such as *Patience and Its Perfect Work*, which includes four sermons on Jas 1:1–5. This book was written after much of Goodwin's personal library was destroyed by fire (*Works*, 2:429–67). It contains much practical instruction on the spirit of submission.

(2) Read *Certain Select Cases Resolved*, which offers three experiential treatises that reveal Goodwin's pastoral heart for afflicted Christians. Each deals with specific struggles in the believer's soul: (a) "A Child of Light Walking in Darkness" encourages the spiritually depressed based on Isaiah 50:10–11 (3:241–350). The subtitle summarizes its contents: "A Treatise Shewing The Causes by which, The Cases wherein, and the Ends for which, God Leaves His Children to Distress of Conscience, Together with Directions How to Walk so as to Come Forth of Such a Condition." (b) "The Return of Prayers," based on Ps 85:8, is a uniquely practical work. It offers help in ascertaining "God's answers to our prayers" (3:353–429). (c) "The Trial of a Christian's Growth" (3:433–506), based on John 15:1–2, centers on sanctification, specifically mortification and vivification. This is a mini-classic on spiritual growth. You might also read *The Vanity of Thoughts*, based on Jer 4:14 (3:509–528). This work, often republished in paperback, stresses the need to bring every thought captive to Christ. It also describes ways to foster that obedience.

(3) Read some of Goodwin's great sermons. They are strong, biblical, Christological, and experiential (2:359–425; 4:151–224; 5:439–548; 7:473–576; 9:499–514; 12:1–127).

(4) Delve into Goodwin's works that explain major doctrines, such as:

(a) *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness Before God in Respect of Sin and Punishment* (10:1–567). This is a weighty treatise on human guilt, corruption,

and the imputation and punishment of sin. In exposing the total depravity of the natural man's heart, this book aims to produce a heartfelt need for saving faith in Christ.

(b) *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith* (8:1–593). This is a frequently reprinted classic on faith. Part 1, on the *objects of faith*, focuses on God's nature, Christ, and the free grace of God revealed in His absolute promises. Part 2 deals with the *acts of faith*: what it means to believe in Christ, to obtain assurance, to find joy in the Holy Ghost, and to make use of God's electing love. One section beautifully explains the "actings of faith in prayer." Part 3 addresses the *properties of faith*: their excellence in giving all honor to God and Christ, their difficulty in reaching beyond the natural abilities of man, their necessity in requiring us to believe in the strength of God. The conclusion provides "directions to guide us in our endeavours to believe."

(c) *Christ the Mediator* (2 Cor 5:18–19), *Christ Set Forth* (Rom 8:34), and *The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth* are great works on Christology (5:1–438; 4:1–92; 4:93–150). *Christ the Mediator* presents Jesus in His substitutionary work of humiliation. It is a classic. *Christ Set Forth* proclaims Christ in His exaltation, and *The Heart of Christ* explores the tenderness of Christ's glorified human nature shown on earth. Goodwin is more mystical in this work than anywhere else in his writings, but as Paul Cook has ably shown, his mysticism is kept within the bounds of Scripture. Cook says Goodwin is unparalleled "in his combination of intellectual and theological power with evangelical and homiletical comfort."<sup>38</sup>

(d) *Gospel Holiness in Heart and Life* (7:129–336) is based on Phil 1:9–11. It explains the doctrine of sanctification in every sphere of life.

(e) *The Knowledge of God the Father, and His Son*

*Jesus Christ* (4:347–569), combined with *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (6:1–522), explore the profound work in the believer’s soul of the three divine persons. *The Work of the Spirit* is particularly helpful for understanding the doctrines of regeneration and conversion. It carefully distinguishes the work of “the natural conscience” from the Spirit’s saving work.

(f) *The Glory of the Gospel* (4:227–346) consists of two sermons and a treatise based on Col 1:26–27. It should be read along with *The Blessed State of Glory Which the Saints Possess After Death* (7:339–472), based on Rev 14:13.

(g) *A Discourse of Election* (9:1–498) delves into issues such as the supralapsarian-infralapsarian debate, which wrestles with the moral or rational order of God’s decrees. It also deals with the fruits of election (e.g., see Book IV on 1 Peter 5:10 and Book V on how God fulfills His covenant of grace in the generations of believers).

(h) *The Creatures and the Condition of Their State by Creation* (7:1–128) is Goodwin’s most philosophical work.

(5) Prayerfully and slowly digest Goodwin’s nine-hundred-plus page exposition of Ephesians 1:1 to 2:11 (1:1–564; 2:1–355). Alexander Whyte wrote of this work, “Not even Luther on the Galatians is such an expositor of Paul’s mind and heart as is Goodwin on the Ephesians.”<sup>39</sup>

(6) Save for last Goodwin’s exposition of Revelation (3:1–226) and his only polemical work, *The Constitution, Right Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ* (11:1–546). Independents would highly value this polemic, while Presbyterians probably would not, saying Goodwin is trustworthy on nearly every subject except church government. Goodwin’s work does not degrade Presbyterians, however. A contemporary who argued against Goodwin’s view on church government confessed that Goodwin conveyed “a truly

great and noble spirit” throughout the work.

Whichever Puritan you choose, familiarize yourself with his various writings. With major and voluminous works be sure to note earlier writings from later writings. This is particularly important with Puritans such as Owen. The young Owen did not agree completely with the later Owen in certain areas, such as the necessity of the atonement. Familiarity with these matters will help you grasp the particular nuances of individual Puritans.

### **SOME OF MY FAVORITE PURITANS**

My favorite Puritan-minded theologian from the English tradition is Anthony Burgess, from the Dutch tradition, Wilhelmus á Brakel, and from the Scottish tradition, Samuel Rutherford. Let me explain why.

#### **ANTHONY BURGESS (d. 1664)**

In my opinion, Anthony Burgess, vicar of Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire from 1635 to 1662, is the most underrated Puritan of all time. I once asked Iain Murray why Burgess was not included in the nineteenth-century sets of the works of the best Puritans. He responded that Burgess was the greatest glaring omission from those reprints.

In fifteen years (1646–1661), Burgess wrote at least a dozen books based largely on his sermons and lectures. His writings reveal a scholarly acquaintance with Aristotle, Seneca, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. He made judicious use of Greek and Latin quotations while reasoning in the plain style of Puritan preaching. Burgess was a cultured scholar and experimental preacher who produced astute, warm, devotional writings.

Burgess wrote about the mysteries of God and was also an experimental writer. He masterfully separated the precious from the vile in *The Godly Man’s Choice*, based on thirteen sermons on Ps 4:6–8. His detailed exegesis in his 145-sermon work on John 17, his 300-page commentary on 1 Corinthians 3, and his 700-page commentary on 2 Corinthians 1 are heart-warming. They fulfilled



Burgess's goal to "endeavour the true and sound Exposition ... so as to reduce all Doctrinals and controversials to practicals and experimentals, which is the life and soul of all."<sup>40</sup>

Several of Burgess's major works are polemical. His first major treatise, *Vindiciae Legis* (1646), based on twenty-nine lectures given at Lawrence-Jewry, vindicated the Puritan view of the moral law and the covenants of works and grace in opposition to Roman Catholics, Arminians, Socinians, and Antinomians. Two years later, Burgess wrote against the same opponents, plus Baxter, in his first volume on justification. He refuted Baxter's work for its Arminian tendencies in arguing for a process of justification that involves the cooperation of divine grace with human works. His second volume on justification, which appeared six years later (1654), discusses the natural righteousness of God and the imputed righteousness of Christ. Those two volumes contain seventy-five sermons. His 555-page *Doctrine of Original Sin* (1659) drew Anabaptists into the fray.

Burgess's best and largest work, *Spiritual Refining: The Anatomy of True and False Conversion* (1652–54)—two volumes of 1,100 pages—has been called an "unequaled anatomy of experimental religion." The first volume, subtitled *A Treatise of Grace and Assurance*, contains 120 sermons; the second, subtitled *A Treatise of Sin, with its Causes, Differences, Mitigations and Aggravations*, contains 42 sermons.<sup>41</sup>

In the first section of the first volume, Burgess refutes the antinomian error that internal marks of grace in a believer are no evidence of his justification. In our opinion, the first sixty pages of the facsimile edition include the best short treatment on assurance in all Puritan literature. Here is one choice quotation in which Burgess shows the need to give priority to Christ and His promises rather than to the marks of grace in ascertaining one's assurance:

We must take heed that we do not so gaze upon ourselves to find graces in our own hearts as

thereby we forget those Acts of Faith, whereby we close with Christ immediately, and rely upon him only for our Justification.... The fear of this hath made some cry down totally the use of signs, to evidence our Justification. And the truth is, it cannot be denied but many of the children of God, while they are studying and examining, whether grace be in their souls, that upon the discovery thereof, they may have comfortable persuasions of their Justification, are very much neglective of those choice and principal Acts of Faith, whereby we have an acquiescency or recumbency upon Christ for our Acceptation with God. This is as if old Jacob should so rejoice in the Chariot Joseph sent, whereby he knew that he was alive, that he should not desire to see Joseph himself. Thus while thou art so full of joy, to perceive grace in thee, thou forgettest to joy in Christ himself, who is more excellent than all thy graces.<sup>42</sup>

Sections two and three describe numerous signs of grace. The remaining nine sections of this volume discuss grace in terms of regeneration, the new creature, God's workmanship, grace in the heart, washing or sanctifying grace, conversion, softening the stony heart, God's Spirit within us, and vocation or calling. Throughout, Burgess distinguishes saving grace from its counterfeits.

In the second volume of *Spiritual Refining*, Burgess focuses on sin. He addresses the deceitfulness of the human heart, presumptuous and reigning sins, hypocrisy and formality in religion, a misguided conscience, and secret sins that often go unrecognized. Positively, he explains the tenderness of a gracious heart, showing "that a strict scrutiny into a man's heart and ways, with a holy fear of sinning, doth consist with a Gospel-life of faith and joy in the Holy Ghost." His goal, as stated on the title page, is to "unmask counterfeit Christians, terrify the ungodly, comfort and direct the doubting saint, humble man, [and] exalt the grace of God."

I discovered Burgess's *Spiritual Refining* a few

days before completing my doctoral dissertation on assurance of faith in the mid-1980s. When I read the first sixty pages of this masterpiece, I was overwhelmed at Burgess's scriptural clarity, insightful exegesis, balance, thoroughness, and depth. I spent two days incorporating some of Burgess's key thoughts into my dissertation. Later, when called on to speak on Burgess's life and his views on assurance for the Westminster Conference (1997), I acquired a nearly complete collection of his writings and immersed myself in them. That fall Burgess surpassed Goodwin as my favorite Puritan author, and has remained so ever since. One of my goals is to bring several of Burgess's works back into print—or better yet, do a complete edition of his works.

• *Recommended reading:* Burgess's *Spiritual Refining*.

#### **WILHELMUS À BRAKEL (1635–1711)**

Wilhelmus à Brakel was a prominent preacher and writer of the *Nadere Reformatie* (Dutch Further Reformation). This movement of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries paralleled English Puritanism.<sup>43</sup> Like English Puritanism, the *Nadere Reformatie* stressed the necessity of vital Christian piety, was true to the teachings of Scripture and the Reformed confessions, and consistently highlighted how faith and godliness work in all aspects of daily life. Consequently, I feel justified in including Dutch "Puritans" in a selection of favorite authors.

I was once asked what book I would take with me if I were stranded on a desert island. My choice was Wilhelmus à Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service*.<sup>44</sup> In my opinion, this is the most valuable set of books available in English today because of the rich doctrinal, experiential, practical, pastoral, and ethical content this classic conveys. For centuries this set of books was as popular in the Netherlands as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was in English-speaking countries. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most Dutch farmers of Reformed persuasion

would read a few pages of "Father Brakel," as he was fondly called, every evening during family worship. When they completed the entire work, they would start over!

This massive work is arranged in three parts. The first volume and most of the second consist of a traditional Reformed systematic theology that is packed with clear thinking, thorough presentation, and helpful application. The concluding applications at the end of each chapter applying the particular doctrines are the highlight of this section. I believe à Brakel's practical casuistry in these applications supersedes any other systematic theologian in his day and ever since. They represent Reformed, Puritan, experiential theology at its best.

The second part expounds Christian ethics and Christian living. This largest section of à Brakel's work is packed with salient applications on topics pertinent to living as a Christian in this world. In addition to a masterful treatment of the ten commandments (chs. 45–55) and the Lord's Prayer (chs. 68–74), this part addresses topics such as living by faith out of God's promises (ch. 42); how to exercise love toward God and His Son (chs. 56–57); how to fear, obey, and hope in God (chs. 59–61); how to profess Christ and His truth (ch. 63); and how to exercise spiritual graces, such as courage, contentment, self-denial, patience, uprightness, watchfulness, neighborly love, humility, meekness, peace, diligence, compassion, and prudence (chs. 62, 64–67, 76, 82–88). Other topics include fasting (ch. 75), solitude (ch. 77), spiritual meditation (ch. 78), singing (ch. 79), vows (ch. 80), spiritual experience (ch. 81), spiritual growth (ch. 89), backsliding (ch. 90), spiritual desertion (ch. 91), temptations (chs. 92–95), indwelling corruption (ch. 96), and spiritual darkness and deadness (chs. 97–98).

The third part (4:373–538) includes a history of God's redemptive, covenantal work in the world. It is reminiscent of Jonathan Edwards's *History of Redemption*, though not as detailed as Edwards; à Brakel's work confines itself more to

Scripture and has a greater covenantal emphasis. It concludes with a detailed study of the future conversion of the Jews (4:511–38).

*The Christian's Reasonable Service* is the heartbeat of the Dutch Further Reformation. Here systematic theology and vital, experiential Christianity are scripturally and practically woven within a covenantal framework. The entire work bears the mark of a pastor-theologian richly taught by the Spirit. Nearly every subject treasured by Christians is treated in a helpful way, always aiming for the promotion of godliness.

In my opinion, this pastoral set of books is an essential tool for every pastor and is also valuable for lay people. The book has been freshly translated into contemporary English. Buy and read this great classic. You won't be sorry.

♦ *Recommended reading:* Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service*.

#### **SAMUEL RUTHERFORD (1600–1661)**

While divided by history, nationality, and race, and to some extent, language, England's Puritans and Scotland's Presbyterians were united by close spiritual bonds of doctrine, worship, and church order. For this reason, I include a Scotsman on my short list of favorite Puritans.

Actually, three Scottish divines have influenced me greatly: Thomas Boston (1676–1732) led me to the depths of my original sin and the beauty and symmetry of covenant theology;<sup>45</sup> Thomas Halyburton (1674–1712) taught me the power of bringing every personal experience to the touchstone of Scripture;<sup>46</sup> and Samuel Rutherford taught me much about loving Christ and being submissive in affliction. For twenty years, I kept a copy of Rutherford's *Letters* (unabridged) on my nightstand, and turned to it countless times when I felt discouraged, challenged, or afflicted. On most occasions, I read until I found my bearings once more in Prince Immanuel. No writer in all of history can so make you fall in love with Christ and embrace your afflictions as Samuel Rutherford can. I agree with Charles Spurgeon who said,

“When we are dead and gone let the world know that Spurgeon held Rutherford's *Letters* to be the nearest thing to inspiration which can be found in all the writings of mere man.”<sup>47</sup> I thank God for this great man of God.

Though Boston and Halyburton rate a close second, my favorite Scottish divine is Rutherford, who first pastored in Anwoth, then was exiled to Aberdeen, and later became professor at St. Andrews. Rutherford's heart was a vast treasure chest filled with unspeakable love for God. Rutherford wrote as one whose heart transcended this world and lighted upon eternal shores. In the midst of trial and affliction, he wrote, “Christ hath so handsomely fitted for my shoulders, this rough tree of the cross, as that it hurteth me no ways.”<sup>48</sup> Even on his deathbed, Rutherford focused on Christ. To those gathered around him, he said, “This night will close the door, and fasten my anchor within the veil.... Glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land!”<sup>49</sup> In life and in death, he found his Savior “altogether lovely” (Song 4:16). “No pen, no words, no image can express to you the loveliness of my only, only Lord Jesus,” he wrote.<sup>50</sup> This is what makes him so devotional, so beneficial, so engaging to read.

Most of Rutherford's letters (220 of 365) were written while he was in exile. The letters beautifully harmonize Reformed doctrine and the spiritual experiences of a believer. They basically cover six topics: (1) Rutherford's love and desire for Christ, (2) his deep sense of the heinousness of sin, (3) his devotion for the cause of Christ, (4) his profound sympathy for burdened and troubled souls, (5) his profound love for his flock, and (6) his ardent longings for heaven.<sup>51</sup>

Although he did not write his letters for publication, the compilation of them is Rutherford's most popular work. It has been reprinted more than eighty times in English, fifteen times in Dutch, and several times in German and French and Gaelic.

Several of Rutherford's diversified writings have also been republished. His *Communion Sermons*

(1870s), a compilation of fourteen sacramental sermons, was recently published by Westminster Publishing House. *The Covenant of Life Opened* (1655), an exegetical defense of covenant theology, was edited and republished by Puritan Publications. In this, Rutherford reveals himself as an apt apologist and polemicist in defending the bi-covenantal structure of Scripture. His work *Lex Rex* has become a standard in law curriculum; nearly every member of the Westminster Assembly owned a copy. This book helped instigate the Covenanters' resistance to King Charles I and was later used to justify the French and American revolutions. History has generally regarded this work as one of the greatest contributions to political science.

In addition, Soli Deo Gloria has republished *Quaint Sermons of Samuel Rutherford* (1885), composed from compiled shorthand notes from a listener. The warmth of Rutherford's preaching is particularly evident in "The Spouse's Longing for Christ." Like many divines in his day, Rutherford drafted his own catechism, *Rutherford's Catechism: or, The Sum of Christian Religion* (1886), recently reprinted by Blue Banner Publications. This was most likely written during the Westminster Assembly and is filled with many quaint sayings. *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* (1645) contains twenty-seven sermons on Christ's saving work in the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21–28). In nearly every sermon, Rutherford shows the overflowing grace of Christ to Gentiles. He explores the nature of genuine prayer and addresses practical aspects of the trial of faith. Most recently, Banner of Truth published *The Loveliness of Christ* (2007), a little book that contains Christ-centered quotes from Rutherford.

Rutherford's *Letters*, however, remain the author's masterpiece. They are filled with pastoral advice, comfort, rebuke, and encouragement.

• *Recommended reading:* Rutherford's *Letters*.

### **MORE PURITAN FAVORITES**

It is difficult to conclude this section, for I would love to include so many more Puritan

authors. But, to keep this list concise, I will conclude with a list of ten favorite Puritans:

(1) *Anthony Burgess* (see above)

(2) *Thomas Goodwin* (see above)

(3) *John Owen* (1616–1683): This author's sixteen volumes of works, seven volumes on Hebrews, and a book titled *Biblical Theology*, make up a learned library.<sup>52</sup> The sixteen-volume set, which is a reprint of the 1850–55 Gould edition, includes the following:

*Doctrinal* (vols. 1–5). The most noteworthy works in these volumes are: *On the Person and Glory of Christ* (vol. 1); *Communion with God* (vol. 2); *Discourse on the Holy Spirit* (vol. 3); and *Justification by Faith* (vol. 5). Mastery of these works, Spurgeon wrote, "is to be a profound theologian."

*Practical* (vols. 6–9). Especially worthy here are *Mortification of Sin, Temptation, Exposition of Psalm 130* (vol. 6); and *Spiritual-Mindedness* (vol. 7). Volumes 8 and 9 comprise sermons. These books are suitable for the average layperson and have immense practical applications.

*Controversial* (vols. 10–16). Noteworthy are *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* and *Divine Justice* (vol. 10); *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* (vol. 11); *True Nature of a Gospel Church* and *The Divine Original of the Scriptures* (vol. 16). Several works in this section have historical significance (particularly those written against Arminianism and Socinianism) but tend to be tedious for a non-theologian.

Owen's wide range of subjects, insightful writing, exhaustive doctrinal studies, profound theology, and warm devotional approach explain why so many people regard his work with such high esteem. Owen may be wordy on occasion, but he is never dry. His works are invaluable for all who wish to explore the rich legacy left by one who is often called "Prince of the Puritans."

Dozens of Owen's works have been published individually in the past half century, but I advise serious readers of Puritan literature to purchase the sixteen-volume set of Owen's works. For those who have difficulty reading Owen, I recommend

R. J. K. Law's abridged and simplified editions of *Communion with God* (1991), *Apostasy from the Gospel* (1992), *The Glory of Christ* (1994), and *The Holy Spirit* (1998), all published by the Banner of Truth Trust.

I was most influenced by Owen when I spent the summer of 1985 studying his views on assurance. The two books that influenced me most were Owen's treatment of Psalm 130, particularly verse 4, and his amazing *Communion with God*, which focuses on experiential communion between a believer and individual persons of the Trinity.

(4) *Jonathan Edwards* (1703–1758): A class at Westminster Theological Seminary, taught by Sam Logan, motivated me to read most of Edwards's two-volume works in 1983.<sup>53</sup> His sermons convicted and comforted me beyond words. What a master wordsmith Edwards was!

More than sixty volumes of Edwards's writings have been published in the last fifty years.<sup>54</sup> The two books that influenced me most were *Religious Affections*, which is often regarded as the leading classic in American history on spiritual life, and Edwards's sermons on justification by faith.<sup>55</sup> Earlier, I was greatly influenced by *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd*.<sup>56</sup>

I was touched by Edwards's concept of "fittness" throughout his writings, and have often found that concept a great tool for leadership and decision-making. Edwards grounded this concept in God; a God who is always fitting will guide His people to want to do what is fitting in each life situation to bring Him the most glory. Hence, we must ask of every decision we face: What is most fitting in God's sight according to His Word? What will bring God the most honor?

(5) *William Perkins* (1558–1602): Perkins's vision of reform for the church combined with his intellect, piety, writing, spiritual counseling, and communication skills helped set the tone for the seventeenth-century Puritan accent on Reformed, experiential truth and self-examination, and Puritan arguments against Roman Catholicism and Arminianism. Perkins as rhetorician, exposi-

tor, theologian, and pastor became the principle architect of the Puritan movement. By the time of his death, Perkins's writings in England were outselling those of John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and Henry Bullinger combined. He "moulded the piety of a whole nation," H. C. Porter said.<sup>57</sup> Little wonder, then, that Perkins is often called the father of Puritanism.

Perkins first influenced me while I was studying assurance of faith for my doctoral dissertation. Ten years later, his *Art of Prophesying*, a short homiletic textbook for Puritan seminarians, helped me understand how to address listeners according to their various cases of conscience.<sup>58</sup> My appreciation for Perkins has increased over the years. I look forward to spending more time reading his works as general editor with Derek Thomas on a ten-volume reprint of Perkins's works.<sup>59</sup>

(6) *Thomas Watson* (c. 1620–1686): Watson was my favorite Puritan after I was converted in my mid-teens. I read his *Body of Divinity* as a daily devotional. His *All Things for Good* was a wonderful balm for my troubled soul in a period of intense affliction in the early 1980s. His winsome writing includes deep doctrine, clear expression, warm spirituality, appropriate applications, and colorful illustrations. I love his pithy, quotable style of writing.<sup>60</sup>

(7) *Thomas Brooks* (1608–1680): Brooks became my favorite Puritan writer in my late teens. His *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, *The Mute Christian Under the Smarting Rod*, *Heaven on Earth: A Treatise on Assurance*, "The Unsearchable Riches of Christ" (vol. 3), "The Crown and Glory of Christianity" (vol. 4)—a classic on holiness consisting of 58 sermons on Heb 12:14—all ministered to me. Brooks's books are real page-turners. He often brought me to tears of joy over Christ and tears of sorrow over sin. His writings exude spiritual life and power.<sup>61</sup>

(8) *John Flavel* (1628–1691): With the exception of Jonathan Edwards, no Puritan divine was more helpful for me in sermon preparation as a young minister than Flavel. His sermons on Christ's suf-

fering also greatly blessed my soul. What lover of Puritan literature has not been blessed by Flavel's classics: *The Mystery of Providence*, *Keeping the Heart*, *The Fountain of Life*, *Christ Knocking at the Door of the Heart*, and *The Method of Grace*?<sup>62</sup>

(9) *John Bunyan* (1628–1688): When I was nine years old and first experienced a period of conviction of sin, I read Bunyan's *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*. When I saw the book in my father's bookcase, I figured that since I had such a bad heart, that book must be for me!

More importantly, my father read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* to us every Sunday evening after church. When he finished, he started over. I must have listened to that book fifteen times. From the age of fourteen on, I would ask questions about how the Holy Spirit works in the soul, about Mr. Talkative, the Man in the Iron Cage, the House of the Interpreter, and scores of other characters and matters. My father often wept as he answered my questions. When I became a minister, I realized what a rare gift those sessions were. Forty years later, illustrations from Bunyan's great classic still come to mind while I'm preaching.<sup>63</sup>

(10) *Thomas Vincent* (1634–1678): When we find ourselves cold and listless, Vincent can help kindle the fire of Christian love. Just try reading *The True Christian's Love to the Unseen Christ* (1677) without having your affections raised to heavenly places and yearning to love Christ more. Let *The True Christian's Love to the Unseen Christ* be your frequent companion.

Only a handful of Vincent's writings were ever published, and of those, only six have been reprinted in the past fifty years. In addition to *The True Christian's Love to the Unseen Christ*, Vincent wrote *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture* (1673), a very helpful book for young people and children; and *The Good Work Begun* (1673), an evangelistic book for young people, explaining how God saves sinners and preserves them for Himself. Three additional books by Vincent are more solemn treatises. They include *God's Terrible Voice in the City* (1667), an eyewitness account

of London's Great Fire and Great Plague and an analysis of how God judges wickedness in a city; *Christ's Certain and Sudden Appearance to Judgment* (1667), which was also written after the Great Fire of London and was designed to prepare sinners for the great and terrible Day of the Lord; and *Fire and Brimstone* (1670) was written to warn sinners to flee the wrath to come. All of these titles, minus *The Shorter Catechism*, were reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria Publications from 1991 to 2001.<sup>64</sup>

Vincent's works are uniquely refreshing. He used the English language in a captivating way to glorify God and strike at the heart of Christians. It is no wonder that Vincent's works were bestsellers in the eighteenth century.<sup>65</sup>

## IDEAS FOR PRINTING THE PURITANS

If you are skeptical about reading Puritan authors, thinking them outdated and no longer applicable for today, think again. Puritans have much to offer to spiritually hungry young people and older folk today. Though some Puritan titles are not worthy of reprinting, there still are hundreds of great Puritan titles that have not been reprinted since the seventeenth century. At Reformation Heritage Books, we envision bringing many of these back into print by using a five-tier approach:

First, a radical purist approach (that is, no changes in punctuation or word choice, though spelling may or may not be updated), which is reserved mostly for scholars and libraries. This is the approach of Chad Van Dixhoorn and Reformation Heritage Books in printing definitive volumes related to Westminster Assembly materials, including the reprinting in facsimile form of all the books written by Westminster Assembly divines. This will offer an expanding library of English Puritan literature to a new generation of scholars. Such books are not intended for most laypeople.

Second, Reformation Heritage Books will continue to print several Puritan titles per year using the purist approach, which means chang-

ing a minimal number of words and punctuation. With this approach, we will print titles under our Soli Deo Gloria imprint. Approximately ten thousand people continue to buy such material, but the readership is shrinking as people move away from the Authorized Version of the Bible and eventually can no longer grasp old fashioned language without hard work.

Third, more substantial editing will be done on other Puritan titles. Examples of this include Sinclair Ferguson's substantial editing of William Perkins's *The Art of Prophesying*, published by Banner of Truth Trust, and to a somewhat lesser degree, my editing on Soli Deo Gloria's first printing of Thomas Watson's *Heaven Taken by Storm*. This approach would retain the Authorized Version of the Bible for scriptural quotations and the Thee/Thou usage for Deity, with accompanying verb forms, so that it does not read like it is altogether removed from its historical milieu, but would use contemporary pronouns and verb forms for others. Obsolete illustrations would be contemporized or deleted. The advantage of this approach is that it will enhance readability and sales. It is not a coincidence that the top-selling Soli Deo Gloria book for many years was the one edited most thoroughly.

A fourth level is to rewrite Puritan books, using the author's main thoughts. This is the approach Ernest Kevan used with *Moral Law* a few decades ago to summarize Anthony Burgess's work, reducing it from several hundred pages to about one hundred pages. More recently, Stephen Yuille used this approach to rewrite George Swinnock's *The Fading of the Flesh and the Flourishing of Faith*. Reformation Heritage Books is using this book as its inaugural volume in a new series titled Puritan Treasures for Today. Kris Lundgaard also used this approach in rewriting John Owen's *The Enemy Within*. To date, this book has sold more than sixty thousand copies. This type of editing may become the preferred way to print Puritan titles to appeal to more contemporary readers.

A fifth level is combining several authors'

thoughts under a theme. James La Belle and I are experimenting with this approach as we launch the first volume of a series titled Deepen Your Christian Life. In the first volume, *Living by God's Promises*, we draw heavily from three Puritan treatises on God's promises, written by Edward Leigh, William Spurstowe, and Andrew Gray. The next two projected volumes are *Living Zealously* and *Living with a Good Conscience*. In each case, we use extracts from a number of Puritan works, collate their thoughts, then write a book on the subject for the average layperson.

When levels three through five are used, it is critical that the editor and/or author is very familiar with how Puritans think, so as to avoid misrepresentation. It remains to be seen whether levels three through five will sell more books than level two, but early indications are encouraging.

## CONCLUDING ADVICE

Where our culture is lacking, the Puritans abounded. J. I. Packer says, "Today, Christians in the West are found to be on the whole passionless, passive, and one fears, prayerless."<sup>66</sup> The Puritans were passionate, zealous, and prayerful. Let us be as the author of Hebrews says, "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (6:12). The Puritans demanded a hearing in their own day, and they deserve one today as well. They are spiritual giants upon whose shoulders we should stand.

Their books still praise the Puritans in the gates. Reading the Puritans will keep you on the right path theologically, experientially, and practically. As Packer writes, "The Puritans were strongest just where Protestants today are weakest, and their writings can give us more real help than those of any other body of Christian teachers, past or present, since the days of the apostles."<sup>67</sup> I have been reading Christian literature for nearly forty-four years and can freely say that I know of no group of writers in church history that can benefit the mind and soul more than the Puritans. God used their books for my spiritual formation and to help me

grow in understanding. They are still teaching me what John the Baptist said, “Christ must increase and I must decrease” (John 3:30)—which is, I believe, a core definition of sanctification.

In his endorsement of *Meet the Puritans*, R. C. Sproul wrote, “The recent revival of interest in and commitment to the truths of Reformed theology is due in large measure to the rediscovery of Puritan literature. The Puritans of old have become the prophets for our time.” So, our prayer is that God will inspire you to read Puritan writings. With the Spirit’s blessing, they will enrich your life as they open the Scriptures to you, probe your conscience, bare your sins, lead you to repentance, and conform your life to Christ. By the Spirit’s grace, let the Puritans bring you to full assurance of salvation and a lifestyle of gratitude to the Triune God for His great salvation.

Finally, consider giving Puritan books to your friends. There is no better gift than a good book. I sometimes wonder what would happen if Christians spent fifteen minutes a day reading Puritan writings. Over a year that would add up to about twenty books and fifteen hundred books over a lifetime. Who knows how the Holy Spirit might use such a spiritual diet of reading! Would it usher in a worldwide revival? Would it fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord from sea to sea? That is my prayer. *Tolle Lege*—take up and read!

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup>Cited in *Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche* (ed. David Wootton; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 7.

<sup>3</sup>George Whitefield, *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield, M.A....: containing all his sermons and tracts which have been already published: with a select collection of letters* (London: printed for Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771–72), 4:307.

<sup>4</sup>Cited in Steven C. Kettler, *Biblical Counsel: Resources for Renewal* (Newark, DE: Letterman Associates,

1993), 311.

<sup>5</sup>Ligon Duncan, *Calvin for Today* (ed. Joel R. Beeke; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 231.

<sup>6</sup>For a biography of each of these authors and a mini-review of each of these titles, see Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans, with a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006). This book also includes Scottish and Dutch divines whose mindsets are parallel with the English Puritans.

<sup>7</sup>Cited in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, U.K.: Evangelical Press, 2006), 49.

<sup>8</sup>Cornelis Pronk, “Puritan Christianity,” *The Messenger* (March 1997): 5.

<sup>9</sup>William Greenhill, *Exposition on the Prophet of Ezekiel* (London: Samuel Holdsworth, 1839), 110.

<sup>10</sup>Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 32. Venning is citing Bunyan.

<sup>11</sup>John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 6:85.

<sup>12</sup>John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 1:42.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas Adams, *The Works of Thomas Adams* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1862), 3:224.

<sup>14</sup>Samuel Rutherford, *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006), 173.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 426.

<sup>16</sup>Edmund Calamy, *Sermons Concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1722), 6.

<sup>17</sup>Henry Scougal, *The Works of Henry Scougal* (New York: Robert Carter, 1846), 169.

<sup>18</sup>Thomas Watson, *All Things for Good* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 28.

<sup>19</sup>J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 24.

<sup>20</sup>William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 7.

<sup>21</sup>Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2001), 4:383.

<sup>22</sup>Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 13.

<sup>23</sup>[www.puritanseminary.org](http://www.puritanseminary.org)

<sup>24</sup>Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

<sup>25</sup>Peter Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism* (Grand Rap-



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- <sup>27</sup>Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans* (3 vols.; Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994).
- <sup>28</sup>William S. Barker, *Puritan Profiles* (Fearn: Mentor, 1999).
- <sup>29</sup>Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006).
- <sup>30</sup>Thomas Watson, *The Art of Divine Contentment* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2001); idem, *Heaven Taken By Storm* (Orlando: Northampton Press, 2008); idem, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988).
- <sup>31</sup>John Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1963).
- <sup>32</sup>George Swinnock, *The Fading of the Flesh and the Flourishing of Faith* (ed. Stephen Yuille; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009).
- <sup>33</sup>*The Works of John Flavel* (6 vols.; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968); *The Works of George Swinnock* (5 vols.; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002).
- <sup>34</sup>Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998), Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1968).
- <sup>35</sup>*The Works of John Bunyan* (3 vols.; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2004).
- <sup>36</sup>For the reprinting of the original preface, see *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 1:xxix–xxxii.
- <sup>37</sup>Edmund Calamy, *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (ed. Samuel Palmer; London: Alex Hogg, 1778), 1:186.
- <sup>38</sup>Paul Cook, "Thomas Goodwin—Mystic?" in *Diversities of Gifts* (London: Westminster Conference, 1981), 45–56.
- <sup>39</sup>Alexander Whyte, *Thirteen Appreciations* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1913), 162.
- <sup>40</sup>Anthony Burgess, *Second Corinthians 1*, intro.
- <sup>41</sup>International Outreach has recently done two two-volume editions of Burgess's *Spiritual Refining* (Ames, Iowa: International Outreach, 1986–96). Only one hundred copies were printed of the first edition, a facsimile, which contains the complete unabridged text of 1658. The second edition of *Spiritual Refining*, an abridged edition, is worth the investment for those who have difficulty reading facsimile print, though choice sections have been removed.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., 1:41.
- <sup>43</sup>For summaries of the *Nadere Reformatie* in English, see Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 383–413; Fred A. van Lieburg, "From Pure Church to Pious Culture: The Further Reformation in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic," in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives* (ed. W. Fred Graham; Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 409–30.
- <sup>44</sup>Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (4 vols.; trans. Bartel Elshout; ed. Joel R. Beeke; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2001).
- <sup>45</sup>Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston, Ettrick* (12 vols.; ed. Samuel M'Millan; repr., Wheaton: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980).
- <sup>46</sup>Thomas Halyburton, *The Works of Thomas Halyburton* (4 vols.; Aberdeen: James Begg Society, 2000–2005).
- <sup>47</sup>Charles Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel*, 189.
- <sup>48</sup>Samuel Rutherford, *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 144.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid., 21–22.
- <sup>50</sup>Samuel Rutherford, *The Loveliness of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007), 88.
- <sup>51</sup>Adapted from Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 729–30.
- <sup>52</sup>John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (16 vols.; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996); idem, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (7 vols.; London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985); idem, *Biblical Theology* (trans. Stephen Westcott; Morgan, PA: Soli

Deo Gloria, 1994).

<sup>53</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974). Cf. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (26 vols.; New Haven: Yale, 1957–2008). Each volume in the Yale series has been thoroughly edited by scholars, and includes, on average, 35 to 150 pages of introduction. This series is essential for aspiring scholars of Edwards. Those interested in reading Edwards for devotional benefit could better purchase the two volume edition of his *Works*, since the Yale volumes are expensive.

<sup>54</sup>Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 193–233.

<sup>55</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001); idem, *Justification by Faith Alone*, (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000).

<sup>56</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).

<sup>57</sup>H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (London: Cambridge University, 1958), 260.

<sup>58</sup>William Perkins, *The Art of Propheying* (ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996).

<sup>59</sup>William Perkins, *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (3 vols.; London: John Legatt, 1612–13).

<sup>60</sup>Seventeen of Watson's titles have been reprinted in recent decades, though to date no complete works set has ever been printed (Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 606–613).

<sup>61</sup>Thomas Brooks, *The Works of Thomas Brooks* (6 vols.; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001).

<sup>62</sup>John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (6 vols.; repr., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968).

<sup>63</sup>John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan* (3 vols.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999).

<sup>64</sup>Thomas Vincent, *The True Christian's Love to the Unseen Christ* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994); idem, *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); idem, *The Good Work Begun: A Puritan Pastor Speaks to Teenagers* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999); idem, *God's Terrible Voice in the City* (Morgan, PA: Soli

Deo Gloria, 1997); idem, *Christ's Certain and Sudden Appearance to Judgment* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2001); idem, *Fire and Brimstone* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999).

<sup>65</sup>Andrew R. Holmes, *The Shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief and Practice, 1770-1840* (England: Oxford University, 2006), 277.

<sup>66</sup>Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, xiii.

<sup>67</sup>Cited in Hulse, *Reformation & Revival*, 44.