

THE BLESSEDNESS OF NEARNESS TO GOD

"But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works." Psalm 73:28.

This interesting and helpful Psalm reveals the fact that its author had suffered great mental and spiritual conflict. He had passed through a time of darkness and doubt. He had been looking at others and had observed that apparently the ungodly prospered, whereas the godly always seemed to be in trouble. It seemed to him that believers had the hard time in this world and the unbelievers were successful and prosperous. He had actually wondered if, after all, there was any purpose in being godly, since they had so many painful experiences while others never seemed to have any trouble. He was tempted to ask, Is God just? Is there any point in trying to walk the straight and narrow way? Is there any use in trying to live a God-fearing life? The more he thought along that line, the more he was tempted to say, "Goodness is vain, the righteous suffer and the ungodly are immune." Seen from the worldly point of view, it seemed to the Psalmist that the unbeliever had the best of it. To him the wicked appeared to be flourishing and triumphant, while the righteous were destitute and oppressed, and much disorder seemed to prevail in the course of their affairs.

At last the Psalmist went to the house of God, and there God opened his eyes and gave him the right perspective. God set him straight in his process of thinking, taught him the importance of thinking spiritually and convinced him that he had been entirely wrong in his thoughts about the ungodly, wrong in his thoughts about himself and wrong in some of his opinions about God. Then God convinced him of the fact that He was still ready to bless him. He was thoroughly convinced of his own stupidity and irrationality. Then he began to adore, praise and worship God. He soon realized that whatever might happen to him that God was still the source of his strength. Having realized that God was still ready to bless him, the Psalmist was amazed that he had ever felt as he did. He regretted the fact that he had been so wrong and arrogant.

What had changed his attitude? It was the fact that he had taken his problems with him to the temple of worship. While there he had found their solution and gained peace for himself. Immediately he adopted a loftier view of life and made the emphatic assertion: "It is good for me to draw near to God."

The Psalmist had learned what everyone of us should know, namely, the one thing that matters most is man's relationship to God. In substance he said, if I am near to God, it really does not matter what happens to me; but if I am far from God, nothing can be right. This is a very profound conclusion. We all tend to think that we need certain things. We are interested in conditions, in events and in our happiness. We are prone to think that our happiness depends upon these other things. It was simply because the Psalmist had been thinking in this way that he had gotten in such a wretched condition. The very sight of the apparent prosperity of the ungodly had upset him, and had made him envious, and he had begun to grumble and complain. He had spent days and weeks in that wretched state of self-pity, but at last he had learned that it was due entirely to one thing and that was he had not remained close to God. The very moment any Christian gets away from God things go wrong.

It is exactly like a ship crossing the ocean that suddenly loses sight of the North Star, or in which the compass goes wrong. If we lose our bearings, we must not be surprised at what takes place. The one thing that matters is to be near unto God. When a Christian goes away from God things go wrong and he is wretched, but when he returns to God, even though the conditions remain much the same, he is full of peace and joy. Whatever else happens, the essential thing is to remain near unto God. To draw near to God is the best thing that anyone can do.

The fact that we can draw near to God implies that it is possible to be at a distance from Him, which is exactly what is true of far too many professing Christians. Fellowship with God is a blessed experience for any Christian.

Let none of us get the idea that living in nearness to God is something that is vague, visionary or beyond our reach. It is something which is both desirable and practical, and not the least incompatible with domestic, social or business responsibilities. Living in nearness to God is never a hindrance to the best kind of daily living.

I. The Recipe For Nearness To God.

What are some of the things that are necessary for us to experience nearness to God?

1. Devoutly reading His Word.

Its prayerful perusal has blessed myriads of souls by bringing them near to God. George Mueller, that mighty man of faith, said while reading the Bible through the sixty-seventh time, "It grows more interesting and helpful all the time." It is our guidebook from earth to heaven. Let us read it for guidance. It will point to the road of Christian peace and joy. "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). No soul will go far astray that constantly feeds on the Word of God.

2. Sincerely meditating on God.

The Psalmist said, "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies" (Psalm 119:59). "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue" (Psalm 39:1). Many a troubled soul has had the mists to clear in the hour of meditation and his soul has felt the truth, "It is good for me to draw near to God." Holy meditations are a glorious privilege. What a pity that we do not take more time for them! Meditation on God, His providences, mercies, goodness and graciousness will set aglow the altar fires of our souls.

3. Earnestly praying to God.

"The prayer of the upright is His delight" (Proverbs 15:8). Prayer is the best means of drawing near to God. It is good for every person who knows how to practice this heavenly art. Prayer is the way into the Father's presence and the most blissful of all fellowships. Prayer explains mysteries, brings deliverances and obtains promises. It has a mighty power to sustain the soul of the Christian in every season of its distress and sorrow. There is no joy equal to that due to the presence of God in the soul. It is the occasion of a peace of which the world knows nothing.

It should be the desire of our hearts to live as near to God as possible because of His character. Above all else we should desire to be in His presence. We like to be in the presence of people whom we love. We like to be introduced to people who are considered great in various ways. And yet how hesitant we are about spending our time in the presence of God. But, the Psalmist wanted above everything else to keep in touch with God. We are grateful to some great personage when he says: "I am going to keep in touch with you." We feel it is a privilege and an honor.

4. Publicly worshipping God.

The Psalmist was in great perplexity and full of trouble about the circumstances which surrounded him. He saw the wicked prospering and the godly in distress. He tried to reconcile this strange providence with the goodness of God. He was unable to solve this mystery until he went into the sanctuary of God and worshiped. Then he understood what was previously mysterious.

5. Heartily praising God.

The best place in which to praise God is in His house of worship. It was in just such a place that the Psalmist was made to cry out, "It is good for me to draw near to God." If you have doubts and misgivings, take them into a spiritual meeting and they will soon leave you.

6. Fully yielding to God.

"Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:13). Before any blessedness can come there must be a full surrender of self unto God. His call is "My Son, give me thine heart" (Proverbs 23:26). Fully yield yourself to His control.

7. Consistently keeping good company.

A young man of the underworld was taken to a Christian hospital in a desperate condition. For days he lingered between life and death. Finally, they told him that he might have his friends come to see him. He said, "I have found this place an altogether different world to that in which I have lived. These girls are Christians and my friends are not worthy to come into their presence. The men I run with are criminals and the women strangers to purity. I don't want them to come, and when I get out my habits of life are going to be altogether different." Our associates either lift us up or pull us down. Christian friends and good books will aid us greatly in drawing and living near to God.

II. The Results Of Nearness To God.

1. Security.

Living in nearness to God will keep one a safe distance from the places where he ought not to be. It will keep one out of fellowship with bad associates. Nothing can harm a person who is kept by Almighty God.

2. Sustenance.

Nearness to God guarantees adequate wisdom and strength for the

duties of life, regardless of how difficult they may be. In times of temptation, adversity, bereavement and old age one always finds adequate strength if he is living close to God.

3. Satisfaction.

There is no satisfaction which is comparable to that of a consciousness of being near to God. The moments of supreme peace and joy in your life have been those when you were nearest to God. There is nothing to equal the peace, happiness and joy which come from being near unto God.

4. Service.

The Psalmist declared that he had put his trust in the Lord God, that he might declare all of His works; or, in other words, that he might glorify Him. "The chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever." Yes, says the Psalmist, "I am going to keep near to God in order that I may glorify Him as well as enjoy His presence. And my business in life is to tell others about Him by life and by lip, in word and in action." Living near to God is so honorable, so delightful and so elevating. When a soul thus lives near to God, even death is a wondrous victory, crowned with the conscious presence of His Lord.