

# DEVOTIONAL HOURS WITH THE BIBLE

READINGS FROM THE PSALMS

BY

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## PREFACE

**THESE** are two methods of studying the Bible. One is, verse by verse, giving close thought to every word, even looking into etymology and grammatical construction, so that the exact sense of the text may be learned. Such study is important. Many rich shades of meaning are often revealed by intelligent and scholarly exegesis. Commentaries that take us over the Bible in this microscopical way are valuable. We need every particle of light on the Scriptures we can get.

Then, another way of studying the Bible is in order to get from it practical lessons for our own daily common life. What does the passage teach us? What divine instruction have we in it for ourselves? It is the latter purpose that is in mind in this book. It is not a commentary in the usual sense. It is not an exegetical study of the Scriptures that is proposed. No textual criticism is given. There is no discussion of questions of dates, of localities, of authorships, or archæological researches. Its single aim is to suggest some of the spiritual and practical lessons which may be gathered from great passages.

The book does not attempt to cover every chapter; to do this would make it altogether too long—

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it deals only with what appear to be leading and representative portions of the Bible.

It is a book for use in the inner chamber, where life receives its impulses for conduct, for duty, for service, and for devotion. The Bible is a very ancient book, but it is also a book for to-day. It brings us face to face with God, and its teachings are meant to guide us in all our ways.

J. R. M.

## PREFACE TO THIS VOLUME

**THE** Book of Psalms is wonderfully rich in devotional matter. It would be easy to extend the one volume to many. The few readings that are given are without critical notes of any kind and are altogether of a practical nature. They are given in the hope that they may help in the enrichment of the spiritual life of those who shall read them.

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## PSALM I

### THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

**BLESSED** is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.—Verses 1-6.

DR. MARVIN R. VINCENT has written a delightful book on certain of the Psalms, which he has happily called "Gates Into the Psalm Country." It is pleasant to notice that the gate into the whole Psalm country, the very first word in the Book of Psalms, is the word "Blessed." All who enter this wonderful enclosure are blessed. It is interesting to note also that our Lord's first sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, begins with the same word "Blessed"—the gate into the gospel country. This country is the kingdom of heaven, the Father's house, and it abounds with blessings for all who come into it.

The "Blesseds" of the Bible shine as thickly on its pages as stars shine in the sky. A most

interesting and profitable Bible study is to go through the Scriptures to find the passages which tell who are the "blessed" ones. It is pleasant to remember that the last glimpse this world had of Jesus He was in the attitude of blessing. He had His hands stretched out over His disciples on ascension day, blessing them, when He began to rise. Ever since that moment benedictions have been raining down from those pierced hands upon a sorrowing earth.

The "Blessed" of the first Psalm belongs to the good man. In what his blessedness consists we are told in several particulars. First, we learn what kind of man he is not: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." It is well for us to know the things we ought not to do. The Decalogue consists chiefly of "Thou shalt nots." The three clauses of this verse stand like three angels at the entrance of paths that lead to danger, to turn us from them. The Bible "Do nots" and "Shalt nots" are all friendly. If they prohibit certain things it is because those things are not good for us, would harm us. Druggists write "Poison" on bottles and packages which contain substances or mixtures which it would do us injury to use. God takes care to warn us of things that would hurt us. He says, "There is death in that;" "There is sorrow in this;" "This path leads to ruin." We are wise if we always

pay most careful heed to these divine warnings. We are very foolish if we disregard them, saying, "I am not afraid," and then press on in the way of peril.

It is interesting to notice the progress in sin indicated in the three clauses of this verse. First, a man walks in the counsel of the wicked, then soon you see him standing in the way of sinners, and a little later he is sitting among those who scoff—open sinners. There is another progress in the words "counsel," "way," "seat," and still a third in the words "wicked," "sinners," "scornful." The beginnings of evil-doing are usually small. A man follows some wrong counsel first. He does things he knows to be contrary to God's will. Later he is standing where bad men come. Still later he is seen taking his seat in the company of the openly profane, and associating with them. First, he listens to bad advice; next, he goes in bad ways; third, he is in bad company—gone clean over to the enemy.

The place to shut the gates of evil is at the entrance. The only true safety is in avoiding the beginnings. *Obsta principiis*. It is hard to stop when one has started. Every time we repeat some evil thing, it becomes easier to do it again, and still easier with each repetition, until a habit is formed, until the evil has wrought itself into the life and becomes part of it. Good habits are formed in the same way. Do beautiful things, and they will fashion themselves into a beautiful

#### 4 THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

character. Not doing evil things is one way to be good.

But negatives are not enough. One may be free from vices and yet not be good. Not sowing tares may keep the ground from being infested with weeds, but it will not fill the field with wheat. Not speaking angry words may keep our language free from bitterness, falsehood, impurity, but silences are not enough. We must keep out the weeds and then plant our garden with flowers. We must cease to do evil and then learn to do well. We must refrain from angry and all wrong words, and then fill our speech with gentleness, kindness, and cheering words. We must be good in an active way.

The second verse gives one strong characteristic of the man who is blessed: "But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." It is not said merely that he obeys the laws of the Lord, but that his delight is in it. He loves to obey it and to meditate upon it. We get a lesson here on the right study of the Bible. Do we love it? Do we delight in reading it? Do we meditate upon it day and night? Meditation is well-nigh a lost art. We do not take time to think, to ponder great thoughts. We would rather read newspapers than meditate in silence on God's words. It would be a good thing for us to be alone a season every day, without a book or newspaper in our hands, quietly pondering some word of God. This is the kind of

Bible study that blesses the life. A perfumer bought a common earthen jar and filled it with attar of roses. Soon every particle of the substance of the jar was filled with the rich perfume and long afterwards, and even when broken, the fragments retained the fragrance. So it is that a human life becomes filled, saturated with the word of God, when one loves it and meditates upon it continually. The thoughts, feelings, affections, dispositions, and the whole character become coloured and imbued with the spirit of the Holy Word.

There is in the third verse a beautiful picture of the life of the good man: "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." "Like a tree." We think of the beauty of a tree, for one thing, and a Christian life is beautiful. A tree consists of two parts—a root and trunk, then branches and foliage. The root is unseen, hidden away in the ground, and is not admired; yet it is essential. It holds the tree firmly in its place, and it nourishes it. There is also a hidden, an unseen part of a Christian life. The world does not see when you bow in prayer, when you meditate in secret. It does not see your inner heart-life of faith and love. Yet as the root is essential to the tree, so is this unseen life essential to the Christian. The other part of the tree is the trunk, with its branches.

This is what people see. Here is where the beauty is. Every Christian life has also a visible part—the character, the conduct, the acts.

“Like a tree planted.” There is a suggestion here of culture and care. The tree is planted by some one. Jesus said, “My Father is the husbandman;” God plants each Christian life. We are therefore in the right place, since our Father has put us into it. People sometimes say that if they had circumstances different from those they have, if they had less trial, more ease, they could be better Christians. But if God plants us He has not placed us wrongly, and we can grow just where we are into beauty and fruitfulness. Some trees are made for warm climates, some for cold, and each must have its own zone; some Christians need severe experiences and some need gentle skies. God knows best where to plant His trees and where to place His children.

“Planted by the streams of water.” Trees need water; they cannot live without it. God’s people must have grace to nourish them. Some trees grow in bare, dreary places, far from flowing streams, and we wonder how any water gets to them. But wherever a tree grows, water gets to its roots in some way, through some underground rills, and nourishes it. We sometimes see people who appear to have no joy, no blessing. Their lives seem full of trouble. Yet they are happy and grow beautifully in Christian life. Here is one who lives and works among wicked

persons, yet lives sweetly and honours God. Here is one who is sick for years, shut away from privileges, suffering continually. Yet his face shines with the light of peace, and he is patient and joyful. God sends streams of grace and love to the roots of these lives and blesses them. Wherever God plants us He will nourish us, and we can live beautifully.

“That bringeth forth his fruit in his season.” Fruit is the purpose of existence in a tree. If it bear not fruit it is cut down and cast into the fire. Jesus makes it very emphatic that fruit is the test of discipleship. What is fruit? In one of his epistles St. Paul shows us a cluster of fruits. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” These are fruits of character. Christian activities are also fruits. The acts of kindness we perform, the words of love and cheer we speak, plant seeds where they will grow into beautiful things.

What is the purpose of fruit? It is not merely to decorate the tree. It is not hung on the branches merely to be ornamental. Fruit is to be eaten, to feed the hunger of men. The test of a Christian life, therefore, is that by its sympathy, love, comfort, helpfulness, cheer, influence, and service in all ways, it is a blessing to others, feeds their heart hunger, makes them happier, stronger, better.

Two little words in the clause are important—

“his fruit.” Every tree bears its own fruit; every Christian life is designed to be a blessing in its own particular way. Trying to do what somebody else does is the weakness of many good people. If we could all be content to do good in our own way we would do the most possible for Christ and for the world.

“In his season.” Each season has its own fruits. So it is in life. The forms of usefulness and helpfulness continually vary. Each period of a good life also has its own particular fruit—youth, manhood, old age. Some fruits do not ripen until frost comes. In many lives there are fruits that come to ripeness only in sorrow.

The unwithering leaf is another feature of the tree that here stands as a picture of a good life. There are some Christians whose activity depends entirely upon their circumstances. When all things go well with them they are happy, but when trouble comes they are down in the depths. In revival times they are all aglow with fervour, but in hot summer days, or in times of spiritual inactivity they become lethargic and indolent. But the ideal Christian is always trustful and at peace, and abounding in the work of the Lord.

Success is the outcome. “Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” Not always in the earthly sense, for oftentimes the best men fail in their worldly plans and efforts. But there is a prosperity that goes on even in worldly failure. A man’s business may be wrecked, and he himself



may come out unharmed, made holier and better by the disaster. If we always live right, our souls shall prosper whatever may become of our earthly interests.

Another picture, a picture of the wicked man, is shown in the fourth verse. He is compared to chaff: "The ungodly *are* not so: but *are* like the chaff which the wind driveth away." The contrast between a fruitful tree and chaff is very striking. Chaff is worthless. It has no beauty. It feeds no hunger. Its destiny is to be separated from the wheat and driven away before the wind. The wicked are "like the chaff."

In the last verses of the Psalm we have the end of the wicked. They "shall not stand in the judgment." The righteous are the object of God's watchful, loving care. The way of the wicked leads to destruction.

## PSALM II

### THE KING IN ZION

**WHY** do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?  
2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed.—Verses 1, 2.

'ALWAYS men have been ready to conspire against God. They think of Him as like themselves, as one they can oppose, one whose authority they can reject. To us, with our thought of God as the glorious King of all the world, opposition to Him seems the worst folly. What can puny man do to resist God's power or to interfere with His sway? Yet evermore does heaven behold the spectacle described in the opening of this Psalm: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?"

There are two possible meanings in this "Why?" It may suggest the folly of such opposition. Or it may indicate the enormity of it. It does seem strange that the world so hates God. What has He ever done to hurt anyone? If He were a cruel despot, like many of earth's own kings, it would not be strange if men hated Him. If He were a Nero, or a Caligula, or a Diocletian,

or a Napoleon, it would not be surprising if the nations dreaded Him and if His name aroused rage. But never was there any other king so gentle, so loving. The prophet foretold the reign of the Messiah as most kindly and gracious. He would not break a bruised reed. He would not lift up His voice in the street. He would not strive nor cry. He comes not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. His reign is one of love. A glance over the pages of the Gospels will show us how He fulfilled the Messianic prediction. He went about doing good, healing all manner of sickness, comforting sorrow. The "programme of Christianity," the work of Christ in this world, is mapped out in these words of the prophet Isaiah: "To bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

Does it not seem strange, therefore, that the mention of the name of Christ causes such rage among the nations and peoples of the world? Why do not the people love Him? Why does not the gentleness of His reign win men to loyalty and affection? What is there in Him that makes the world dislike Him? Yet from the day He came

into the world unto the present He has been rejected and despised. When Herod heard of the birth of the King he trembled with anger and slew all the infants of the town in which He was said to be, in hope of destroying the hated One. All through His life it was the same. He did nothing but good, and yet the rulers ceased not to plot against Him, until at last they nailed Him on the cross. It is not otherwise to-day. The gospel breathes only love, and yet it is met by many with hate, scorn, and rage. Why is it? Why do the nations rage? "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." The words tell of revolt. They will defy His rule and cut themselves off from obedience to Him. They treat Him as if His rule were cruel and inhuman.

It is related that, during the war between the English and one of the native tribes of India, several English officers were taken prisoners, some of them having been wounded in battle. A native officer brought in fetters and proceeded to put them on each of the prisoners. As he approached a young man who was suffering severely from pain and weakness, a gray-haired officer said, "You do not think of putting chains upon that wounded young man?" "There are just as many pairs of fetters as there are captives," was the reply, "and every pair must be worn." "Then," said he, "put two pairs on me. I will wear his as well as my own." They were put on and he

wore them until, eluding all earthly barriers and fetters, his spirit followed the leading of the death angel. The younger officer afterwards regained his freedom, and lived to capture the city in which he had been imprisoned. Wounded, weak, and in prison, the man lay, waiting the forging of stronger fetters of sin, when into his prison house came One upon whom was laid the iniquity of us all, and He poured out His soul unto death that we might be free.

“He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.” The picture of God sitting on His throne in heaven, laughing at man’s puny efforts to frustrate His plans, is a very striking one. It suggests to us the calm quiet of God in the face of men’s opposition. Can a man put up his hand and arrest the lightning bolt as it flies athwart the sky? Can he stand beside the sea and with his puny arm hurl back the waves that come rolling from the great deep? And can man resist omnipotence or defeat the divine purpose? Look at the outcome of Herod’s plot to kill the infant Jesus. What came of the rage of the Jewish rulers who finally nailed Jesus on the cross? It only carried out God’s counsel and exalted Him to be a Prince and a Saviour. So always persecution has but advanced Christianity, not destroying it, not hindering its progress. The rage of infidels has resulted in strengthening what they sought to destroy. We need not be afraid when the enemies

of Christ seem to triumph. God is not disturbed on His throne. His plans go on in unbroken fulfillment. He laughs at men's plots and schemes against Him.

“Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” It is a suggestive thought that even this Son of God, exalted on His throne, must ask for the inheritance that was promised to Him. We get the lesson that no blessing comes to us save through our own prayer. The clearest, plainest promises must be taken up and claimed. They are checks which must be presented at the bank before payment will be made. Promises do not mean anything to us until they are believed and then pleaded before God. We know that Christ claimed the Father's promise. Before He ascended He said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” Paul tells us that having humbled Himself to death on the cross, God hath also exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord. So all nations are Christ's. He is the rightful King of all lands. This ought to be an encouraging truth for all missionaries, and in all missionary work. India and China and Africa and the isles of the sea belong to Christ. They have been given to Him by His Father. In going into those lands and preaching the gospel, the missionary is but

claiming Christ's own for Him. So in offering Christ to any man and asking him to accept Him as Saviour and Lord, we are only asking one of Christ's rightful subjects to own his allegiance, to receive his true King.

This word has also its glorious assurance of the success of Christ's kingdom on the earth. God will surely give Him the nations for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession, because He has promised to do so. Not a word of God can ever be broken. Heaven and earth may pass away, but not the smallest of God's words shall ever pass away.

“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” The only true and wise thing to do is to submit in love and reverence to this glorious King. Those who will not yield to Him shall be broken with a rod of iron. Gentle as He is, He is also just. Defiance of Christ can have only one issue. It can end only in the utter destruction of those who lift up their hands in rebellion. Easily as a potter's vessel is dashed in pieces when hurled against the rock shall the proudest human strength be crushed and destroyed by the power of Christ. Submission, therefore, to this heaven-ordained King is the only wise course for anyone. Submission brings life and great gladness. “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” He makes them joint-heirs with Him.

They sit with Him on His throne. They enjoy all the privileges of sonship. "All are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." We should all therefore submit to Christ, the Son of God, and become His subjects.



## PSALM V.

### LIVING UP TO OUR PRAYERS

**MY** voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct *my prayer* unto thee, and will look up.—Verse 3.

“In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.” That is, he would watch to see the answer coming. One interesting illustration of this watching for the answer to prayer is in the case of Elijah’s prayer for rain. The prophet bowed himself on the ground, and began to pray. Then he sent his servant up to the crest of the mountain to look out toward the sea, to keep watch, and tell him what he saw. The servant came back and said he saw nothing. Seven times did Elijah pray, each time bidding the servant to go to the mountain top to look. At length the servant reported that he saw a little cloud as small as a man’s hand coming up out of the sea. The prayer was answered. The prophet believed that rain would come when he prayed, and he looked up and watched for the rising of the cloud, until it appeared. That is the way we should always pray. “In the morning

will I order my prayer unto thee, and I will keep watch."

Must we not confess that oftentimes when we pray we never think again of our requests, and would be greatly surprised if what we asked for should come to us? But if we really desire the things we ask for, we will expect them and will eagerly watch for their coming. Our prayers should be part of our life. They should rule and influence all our living. Always when we pray we should look up, expecting to receive what we have asked for.

There are some of our prayers which if answered will work deep and radical changes in our lives. If we tried seriously to live up to them, we would be rising every day into higher spiritual altitudes. We pray to be made unselfish. Do we mean it? Do we really want to become unselfish? If we put ourselves under discipline, to grow into unselfishness, we should constantly find a restraining hand upon our desires and dispositions, upon our conduct and acts, and should feel in our hearts evermore an impulse toward love and all serving of others. "Love seeketh not its own." It lives for others. It forgets self. "As I have loved you, that ye also love one another," is the Master's statement of the law of Christian life. We pray to be made unselfish. Dare we let the prayer be answered? It would change many things in our conduct, in our treatment of others. It would set us in new relations to all about us. It would

check in us the crafty desire, so common in dealing with men, to get the better of the other man in all transactions, to have the best place. Some one has written this little prayer :

O God, that I might spend my life for others,  
With no ends of my own,  
That I might pour myself into my brothers,  
And live for them alone.

What would happen in our lives if these prayers should be answered?

We pray to be made patient. If we are sincere, and then begin to live up to our prayer, what will the effect be? We shall find our tongues checked and restrained again and again, on the very edge of angry outbursts, when about to speak unadvisedly. We shall have our harsh and bitter feelings softened continually by an irresistible influence toward quietness and gentleness. If our prayer to be made patient were to be answered at once, by one mighty access of grace in our hearts, what a change it would make in us!

There is no prayer that most Christians breathe out to God oftener than that they be made like Christ. But if we really wish to be transformed into Christ's likeness, the desire will burn like a fire in us, cleansing and purifying us, and the new life will become so overmastering in us that it will possess us body and soul, till Christ shall indeed live in us. If while we pray to be made like our Master we live up to our prayer,

old things in us will pass away and all things will become new. The prayer will affect every phase of our behaviour and conduct. It will hold before us continually the image of Christ and will keep ever full and clear in our vision a new standard of thought, of feeling, of desire, of act and word. It will keep us asking all the while such questions as these: "How would Jesus answer this question about duty? How would Jesus treat this man who has been so unkind to me? What would Jesus do if He were here to-day, just where I am?" When we pray to be made like our Master, are we truly willing to have all in us that is unlike Him taken out, and all His beauty now wanting in us wrought in us?

Our Lord has given us some specific and very definite instructions concerning praying and living. For example, He teaches us that if we would have our own sins forgiven, we must forgive those who have sinned against us. The prayer runs, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." There is no mistaking the meaning of this petition. Each time we sin and make confession, asking God to forgive us, it commits us to an act toward others which we ask God to perform toward us. We solemnly pledge ourselves to show the same mercy to our fellow men which we beseech God to show to us. Yesterday some one wronged us, injured us, treated us unkindly, did something which stung us, hurt us. Last night we looked back over our day and it

was blotted and stained. We prayed God to forgive us all these wrong things. He is very merciful and loves to forgive His children. But after our prayer we still kept in our hearts the bitter feelings toward the man who wronged us yesterday—the resentment, the unforgiveness.

Jesus tells us very plainly what we should do when praying, if we discover a wrong feeling in our heart, or if in the bright light we remember something we have done that was not right. He is exhorting against anger in any form, telling us in words that should startle us if we are indulging in any harsh feelings against any other, that hatred, bitterness, and contempt of others are violations of the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." Then He illustrates His meaning by an example: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

When we approach God's altar a glorious light shines upon us, the light of the divine Presence. If in this intense brightness we remember that today or yesterday we did something to another that was not right, that we were unjust to him, that we wronged or injured him, we should seek to get right with our brother before we go any farther with our worship. In order to do this it may sometimes be necessary for us even to interrupt our devotion and go away and confess

what we have done and obtain forgiveness, before we can finish our worship. An old Psalm writer says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear." So we really cannot go on with our prayer if in our breast there are bitter feelings. We must get these out before we can find an open way to God for ourselves. We must get right with God before we can be right with men. "First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

Children sometimes teach us lessons we would do well to remember. There is a story of a boy whose prayer was brought to a sudden pause by his conscience which impelled him to run away and undo a bit of malicious mischief before he could go on with it:

"If I should die 'fore I wake," said Donny, kneeling at his grandmother's knee. "If I should die 'fore I wake"—

"I pray," prompted the grandmother's gentle voice. "Go on, Donny."

"Wait a minute," said the small boy, scrambling to his feet, and hurrying away down stairs. In a little while he was back again, and dropping on his knees took up the prayer where he had left off. "If I should die 'fore I wake, I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take." When the little white-gowned form was tucked away in bed, the grandmother asked the boy why he had so rudely run away in the midst of his prayer. "You

surely did not think or you would not have done it."

"But I did think, grandmother, and that is why I had to stop, you see. I'd upset Teddy's menagerie, and stood all his wooden soldiers on their heads, just to see how he'd tear round in the morning. But if I should die 'fore I wake—why I didn't want Ted to find them that way. So I had to go down and fix 'em all right before I could finish my prayer. There's lots of things that seem funny if you're going to keep on living, but you don't want 'em if you should die 'fore you wake."

"That was right, dear; it was right," commended the grandmother, with a tender quaver in her voice. "A good many of our prayers wouldn't be hurt by stopping in the middle of them to undo a wrong."

It would be well if all of us had a little more of Donny's realism in our praying. It might stop the easy flow of our words sometimes, while we go out to get something right which we see in God's presence to be wrong. But it would save us from some of the mockeries of prayer which now mar our worship.

Take another phase of the subject. "In the morning will I order my prayer unto thee, and will keep watch." There are prayers which we cannot finish on our knees. They can be ended only in some field of duty. When the Hebrews

were leaving Egypt, they seemed to have been caught in a trap beside the Red Sea. Moses was lying on his face, crying to God for deliverance. The Lord called to him, "Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Clearly, duty, for Moses, that moment, was not to stay on his knees, crying to God for deliverance. He must rise and lead the people forward.

There are many illustrations. Your neighbour is in some trouble. You hear of it, and being a believer in prayer, you go to your place of devotion and plead that God would send him the help he needs. But almost certainly, prayer is not the duty of the hour. Rather, it is to rise from your knees and go to your neighbour and with your own hands do for him what he needs to have done. If a friend of yours is taken suddenly ill, or is injured in an accident, your duty probably is not to go to your closet and spend a season in prayer for him, but to hasten for a physician.

It is our duty to pray always, to take everything to God. But usually prayer is not all our duty. Ofttimes, we must go out to answer our own prayers. There is too much selfish praying—praying only for ourselves. Such prayers are not heard. The Lord's Prayer teaches us that we must include all men in our supplications. Love never ends with ourselves, nor does prayer. We must pray for others, and if we pray for our



neighbours we must go forth to answer their cries for help. There is a legend of one who prayed only for himself:

But as he prayed, lo! at his side  
Stood the thorn-crowned Christ and sighed:  
"O blind disciple—came I then  
To bless the selfishness of men?  
Thou askest health, amidst the cry  
Of human strain and agony;  
Thou askest peace, while all around  
Trouble bows thousands to the ground;  
Thou askest life for thine and thee  
While others die; thou thankest Me  
For gifts, for pardon, for success,  
For thine own narrow happiness."

While we pray for those in distress, we must open our hand toward those who need.

It is the weakness of many people's prayers that they end with their utterance. We may think we are keeping watch for the answers, but we are only idly waiting for God to do what He is waiting for us to do. We ask God to give bread to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, not remembering that the Master will say, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in." Prayer for the relief of others in distress must be followed at once by personal ministries of love. We are to pray and then to

hasten out, filled with the Spirit, to do the work that needs to be done. In one of his poems, George Macdonald first calls us to prayer:

Go thou into thy closet; shut thy door;  
And pray to Him in secret—He will hear.

Then farther on he says:

Hark, hark, a voice amid the quiet intense!  
It is thy duty waiting thee without.  
Rise from thy knees in hope, the half of doubt;  
A hand doth pull thee—it is Providence;  
Open thy door straightway, and get thee hence;  
Go forth into the tumult and the shout;  
Work, love, with workers, lovers, all about.

Praying is not all. We must follow our prayers with work, duty, watching, service, or they never will be answered.

Take another phase of the lesson. All praying has for its highest reach, its divinest attainment, perfect submission to the will of God. Every true prayer we make must end with "not my will, but thine, be done." Many prayers therefore never become prayers, because they never become acquiescent in God's will. Before we can look up and see the answers coming we must learn the great lesson of self-surrender. We know not what to pray for as we ought. We do not know what is best for ourselves. Only when we are ready to commit all things that concern us into the hands

of God and let Him order our ways, are we sure that they will be well-ordered. When we are ready to pray thus, we are ready to look up and watch for the answer which God will give. Here is the story of true consecration, the consecration of the will:

Laid on Thine altar, O my Lord divine,  
 Accept this gift to-day for Jesus' sake.  
 I have no jewels to adorn Thy shrine,  
 Nor any world-famed sacrifice to make;  
 But here I bring within my trembling hand  
 This will of mine—a thing that seemeth small;  
 And Thou alone, O Lord! canst understand  
 How, when I yield Thee this, I yield mine all.

Hidden therein Thy searching gaze can see  
 Struggles of passion, visions of delight,  
 All that I have, or am, or fain would be,—  
 Deep loves, fond hopes, and longings infinite.  
 It hath been with tears, and dimmed with sighs,  
 Clenched in my grasp till beauty it hath none;  
 Now from my footstool where it vanquished lies,  
 The prayer ascendeth, "May Thy will be done."

Take it, O Father, ere my courage fail,  
 And merge it so in Thine own will, that e'en  
 If in some desperate hour my cries prevail,  
 And Thou give back my gift, it may have been  
 So charged, so purified, so fair have grown,  
 So one with Thee, so filled with peace divine,  
 I may not know or feel it as mine own,  
 But, giving back my will, may find it Thine.

Such consecration of the will is the supremest reach of faith and life. When we have come to this point we can always look up and know that the answer will come. Some things we hoped for may not come—but if not, then something better will come instead.

## PSALM XVI

### SHOW ME THE PATH

THOU wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore.—Verse 11.

It is a wonderfully sweet song that sings all through this Psalm. It begins with fleeing to God for refuge, and ends with standing at God's right hand in glory at last. One strain of this song is enough for our present meditation. "Thou wilt shew me the path of life." The word is singular—"me,"—Does the great God actually give thought to an individual life? We may believe that He directs the career of certain great men, whose lives are very important in the world; but does He show common people the way? He feeds the sparrows. He clothes the lilies. He calls the stars by their names. Then the Bible is full of illustrations of God's interest in individuals. The Shepherd Psalm has it: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." "He leadeth me." Then we have it here. "Thou wilt shew me the path."

The first thing, if we would have divine guidance, is to realize our need of it. Some people do not. They think they can find the way them-

selves. They never pray, "Show me the way." Here is an experience from Switzerland: Two men, one a military officer from Zurich, undertook the ascent of one of the Alps. They started off without guides, ropes, or any other appliances for safety. Their conduct attracted attention, as they were foolhardy, and the progress of the tourists was watched by many at the hotel, through strong glasses. Soon they were seen to be in trouble, wandering aimlessly over the ice. In a little while one of the men disappeared, and not long afterwards the other one was lost to sight. A searching party went out and it was discovered that the first man had suddenly fallen into a crevice, hundreds of feet deep. A guide was lowered and brought up his dead body. The other had a severe fall, but, more fortunate than his companion, he fell into the snow and was able to crawl out and make his way to the hospice, where he was found in an unconscious state.

It is foolhardy to try to climb the Alps without a guide. It is far more perilous to try to go through this world without a guide. Many people do. Jesus asked His disciples to follow Him, but there was one who would not follow, and he perished, "the son of perdition"—and "went to his own place." If we would find the way, we must be conscious of our need of guidance and must walk obediently in the path the Guide marks out for us.

If we would have God show us the path we

must accept His guidance and trust it. Sometimes we grow impatient of God's leading because He seems to take us only along homely ways and gives us only commonplace things to do. We think we could do more good and make more of our life if we could get out into a wider sphere and have grander things to do. Some people even chafe and fret, and spoil the lowly work that is given them to do, in their discontent with it, and their desire for some larger place and some more conspicuous work. The youth of Jesus teaches us that the truest and divinest life is the one that in its place, high or low, does best the will of God. Browning tells of an angel who took the place of a discontented boy, and did the lowly taskwork which the boy had deserted.

He did God's will—to him all one  
If on the earth or in the sun.

The life of the carpenter's apprentice is as holy as the ministry of a radiant angel close to God's throne. God's will for us is always sacred. When we say, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life," we are not to expect that God will show us some other place to live and work than that in which we are now living and working. Most likely He will leave us just where we are, only calling us to do our work better than ever before, to do it in a new way, with a new spirit, with a new warmth of heart. The work of the present is always the duty to which God calls us. The

way to be ready for the call to a wider field and to a more important work is to a little more than fill the place in which we are now serving, and to do our present duty a little better than we are required to do it. After eighteen years of work in His lowly place as carpenter's apprentice and carpenter, Jesus was led away to the wider field and the greater work. When we have done all the will of God where we are now, He will show us the path to something higher.

Again, the path which will be shown to us may not always be an easy one. It is the path of life, but the way of life oftentimes leads through pain. The baby begins its life in a cry, and in some form or other we suffer unto the end. The old belief was that pain was because of sin. If a man suffered greatly, his neighbour thought he must be a wicked man. There is trouble that is the fruit of sin. We cannot do wrong and escape suffering. The suffering is the revolt of your soul against the wrongdoing. It is the mercy of God trying to save you. But there is suffering which tells of spiritual growth. The best things in Christian character come out of pain.

Sometimes there is inscrutable mystery in the trial through which good people are led. A few years ago a happy young couple came from the marriage altar. They were full of hope and joy. Their home was bright with love. A year later a baby came. It was welcomed by the young parents with great gladness. They gave the little



one to God. From the beginning, however, the child was a sufferer. All its short years it has been sick. The young parents have done all that self-sacrificing love could do, all that money could do, in the hope that the little one would recover. The best physicians have been consulted and have exhausted their skill in vain efforts to cure the child. But at three and a half years, when other children are so bright, so beautiful, such centers of gladness and happiness in their homes, this little one is like a baby still in her helplessness, not seeing the faces that bend over her in passionate love, not responding to the caresses and tendernesses which are lavished upon her. The child was taken recently to one of the best physicians in the land. After careful examination, the doctor's decision was that the case was absolutely hopeless. Till that moment the mother had still hoped that her child might some time be cured. Now she understood that how long soever the little one may stay with her, she will never be any better.

“What shall I do?” was the mother's question the other evening when her pastor listened to the story of the visit to the great doctor. “What can we do? What ought we to do?” she asked. What comfort can the minister give to such mothers and fathers as these? He can assure them, first, that their child is as dear to God as if she were well and strong and bright. God is like a mother in His tenderness and in His yearn-

ing love for one who is suffering. This child is dear to God and has His gentlest sympathy and care. Then some day it will be well. Heaven is the place where earth's arrested growths will reach perfection, where earth's blighted things will blossom in full beauty. The child will not be sick, nor blind, nor imperfect there. The hopelessness of her condition is only for the present life. Some day the mother's dreams of beauty, not realized here, will all be fulfilled, and her prayer for her child's health will be answered. Is there not comfort in this?

But meanwhile? Yes, it is hard to look upon the child's condition, so pathetic, so pitiful, and to remember the great doctor's words: "Absolutely hopeless. She never will be any better." Is there any comfort? Can this mother say, "Thou wilt show me the path of life"? Is this experience of suffering part of that path? Does God know about the long struggle? Has He heard the countless prayers that have gone up from this home for the baby's recovery? Does He know what the doctor said the other day? Yes, He knows all. Has He, then, no power to do anything? Yes, He has all power. Why, then, has He not cured this child? Why does He allow the agony to continue in the heart of the mother?

We may not try to answer. We do not know God's reasons. Yet this we know—It is all right. God is love—God is never unkind. What good can possibly come from this child's condition and

from its continuation year after year? We do not know. But God knows.

Perhaps it is that the child may be prepared for a mission in glory which shall surpass in splendour the mission of any other child that is well and joyous here. Or perhaps it is for the sake of the mother and father, who are being led through these years of anguish, disappointment, and bitter sorrow, and will be cleansed and transfigured. Many people are sufferers for others' sakes. At least we know that these young parents are receiving a wonderful training in unselfishness, in gentleness, in patience, in trust. Perhaps all this sore experience in their child is to make them holier. The disciples asked the Master whose sin it was—the blind man's or his parents', that he was born blind. Neither. "No one's sin," Jesus replied, "but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." This blindness gave Jesus the opportunity to do a work of mercy. May it not be that this child's condition finds its justification in the ministry of love it has called out in the mother and the father? It has been a wonderful training and education for them. They are being prepared for a blessed service to other suffering ones. Perhaps in the other life they will learn that they owe to their feeble, blind child's long and painful suffering much of what they shall then wear of the beauty of the likeness of Christ.

In one of the famous lace shops of Brussels there are certain rooms devoted to the spinning

of the finest and most delicate lace patterns. These rooms are altogether dark save for the light from one very small window, which falls directly upon the pattern. There is only one spinner in the room, and he sits where the narrow stream of light falls upon the threads that he is weaving. "Thus," we are told by our guide, "do we secure our choicest products. Lace is always more delicately and beautifully woven when the worker himself is in the dark and only his pattern is in the light."

May it not be the same with us in our weaving? Sometimes it is very dark. We cannot understand what we are doing. We are not able to discover any beauty, any possible good in our experience. Yet if only we are faithful, fail not, and faint not, we shall some day know that the most exquisite work of our life was done in those very days. If you are in darkness because of some strange, mysterious providence, let nothing make you afraid. Simply go on in faith and love, never doubting, not even asking why, bearing your pain and learning to sing while you suffer. God is watching and He will bring good and beauty out of all your pain and tears.

Notice, again, that it is "the path of life" which God will show us. He never shows us any other path. God's paths are all right paths, paths of holiness. If you are prompted to go in some evil way, you may be sure it is not God that is leading. He leads you as far as He can away

from the evil. He leads in the path of life. It may be steep and rough, but the end will be so blessed, so glorious, that in its joy you will forget the briars and thorns on the way.

“Oh, you will not mind the roughness nor the steepness  
of the way,  
Nor the chill, unrested morning, nor the dreariness of  
the day;  
And you will not take a turning to the left or to the  
right,  
But go straight ahead, nor tremble at the coming of the  
right,  
For the road leads home.”

“Thou wilt show me the path of life.” There are days when you do not know what to do. You have perplexities, doubts, uncertainties. You lie awake half the night wondering what you ought to do. Something has gone wrong in your affairs, in your relations with a friend, in your home life. Or one near to you is suffering and you want help, but do not know what to do. Your days are full of questions. Do you know that there is One who is infinitely wise, never makes a mistake, nor misleads anyone, who wants to show you the way, no matter what the experience is? Instead of vexing yourself, just go to Him and say, “Shew me the path,” and He will.

There is something else. It is told of Saint Wenceslaus, King of Bohemia, that he was one night going to prayer in a distant church, bare-

foot, over the snow and ice, and his servant, Podavivus, following him, imitating his master's devotion, waxed numb and faint. "Follow me," said the king, "and set thy feet in the prints of mine." The master's words encouraged the servant and he followed on. That is what our Master says when we grow weary in the hard way, when the thorns pierce our feet, or when the path grows rough or steep. "Follow me. Put your feet into my shoeprints. It is but a little way home."

"O Master, point Thou out the way,  
Nor suffer Thou our steps to stay;  
Then in the path that leads to day  
We follow Thee.

"Thou hast passed on before our face;  
Thy footsteps on the way we trace;  
O keep us, aid us by Thy grace;  
We follow Thee."

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life." There is a path on which our Master wants us to walk. He has it all down among His purposes—where He wants us to go, what He wants us to do, the people He wants us to help. The path leads at last to the door of the Father's house. Would it not be a sad thing if you should miss the way? Well, you will surely miss it and get lost in the dreadful tangles unless you ask Christ to show you the path. Like a little child, look up into the face of the Master and say, "Shew me the path of life," and He will.

## PSALM XIX

### GOD'S WORKS AND WORD

**THE heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. 2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. . . . 14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.—Verses 1, 2, 14.**

We have two Bibles. One is written on the pages of nature and the other on the pages of the inspired word. In this Psalm we have the summaries of the teaching of both. In the earlier portion the poet tells us about the teachings of the heavens: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." And if in David's days God's glory was declared in the heavens, how much more now, since the telescope has revealed such marvelous things about the extent of the starry world that were not known then! Only remember that nearly all the stars we see are suns, probably centers of systems of planets, and that those we see are but the merest fraction of the number the telescope brings into view. The truth is, that there are millions of suns in the heavens, some of them so far from us that

it takes thousands of years for light to come from them to us.

Anyone who has given even a little attention to the study of astronomy is prepared to appreciate the thought of this verse. The heavens declare the glory of God. Think what glories of the night there are that day hides! If the sun never set we should never see the splendours of the heavens. A poet imagines our first parent watching the sun nearing the horizon the evening of his first day. He was in great terror as he thought of the sun sinking away and leaving the world in darkness. But when the orb of day disappeared quietly, lo! a new universe had burst upon his vision. Night revealed far more than it hid.

Think of the power that called into being such a multitude of worlds, and that keeps them in being age after age. Think of the wisdom that made such a universe of flying suns, planets, and comets, so adjusting their orbits and their motions that they never clash in their orbits, that they move age after age, so that perfect harmony prevails among the spheres. Science, instead of being an enemy of religion, is its friend. The more we learn of the marvelous things of God's world, the more do we see for which to praise and adore the divine name. This is true of all things in nature. There is more beauty in a single little flower than in the finest work of art ever fashioned by human hand. From the minutest insects to the vast stars, every department of the universe declares



the wisdom, the power, the goodness, the faithfulness of God. We ought to study nature more; it is one of God's books.

“Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” Evermore nature speaks of God. Day has its glories, when in the sunshine we see the beauties of field, garden, mountain, valley, forest, river, flower, and plant. Then night comes, and instead of making desolation in the darkness, it unveils to us its marvelous splendour of sky and stars. Creation widens then, in man's view, and to a devout mind everything speaks of God. There are spiritual revealings in all nature's pages to him who has eyes. A lady once said to Turner, the great artist, “But, Mr. Turner, I can't see in nature all that you say there is.” “Ah, madam, don't you wish you could?” replied the artist. Some one may say, “I can't see the divine wisdom and love in nature.” Don't you wish you could? Says Mrs. Browning truly:

Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God,  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;  
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.

Then the Psalm passes from the teachings in nature to the revealings of the divine word. The works of God declare His glory, but not His will. For this we turn to His word. We never could learn by study the stars, the flowers, or the rocks,

how we ought to live; what is right and what is wrong, what will please God or displease Him. We never could learn what God Himself is, what His attributes are, how He feels toward us. We may learn from His works that He is great, powerful, wise, unchanging, good; but we could not learn from the stars that He loves us with a tender, personal affection, that He is merciful and gracious. We never could find a gospel of salvation for lost sinners in the works of God. How thankful we should be for His word, which tells us all these things! Here we have His law, revealed by His own Spirit. It teaches us how to live. It is a perfect law; not only perfect in that it is without flaw, but also in that it is complete as a revelation, containing all we need to know to be saved and to reach the full stature of perfect men and women. We may turn to the law of the Lord with every question of duty, and we shall always find the right answer.

Then, it is a beautiful statement also of the ministry of the word which we have. It restores the soul. Every human soul needs to be restored. It is ruined by sin; its beauty is tarnished, its grandeur destroyed. The word of God is able to build it up, to transform it, to restore the lost splendour, to bring back again the defaced image of God. Everyone knows the power the word of God has over human lives. It first shows men that they are condemned and lost, as it holds up

before them the requirements of the divine law. Next, it shows them the cross with its salvation for the guilty. Then it declares to them the will of God by which they are to learn to fashion their lives. As they begin to obey this holy will, it leads them on higher and higher, until they enter heaven's gates and wear the likeness of Christ. Thus it restores the soul, transforming it into the likeness of God, which sin had defaced.

“The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” Many people think that a good life is gloomy. They suppose that Christians have no joy. They have to deny themselves many pleasures. They cannot have the good times worldly people have. They have to live strictly. They have to follow conscience in all things. It must be very hard. Life must be dreary and joyless to them. So the people talk who boast of being free from the restraints of religion, and who imagine that they themselves have the happiest times possible. But, as a matter of fact, the happiest people in this world are those who are keeping God's commandments. Who ever heard of sin “rejoicing the heart?” Disobedience never made anyone happy; but obedience always gives peace. There are fresh-water springs in the sea which always pour out sweet water beneath the brackish tides. So in the obedient heart, under all self-denials, there is a spring of joy ever flow-

ing. The Christian has sorrows, but he has comfort which turns his sorrows into joy. He practices self-denials, and lives under the restraints of holiness, but he has rewards which far more than compensate for the cost of his service to Christ.

“Moreover by them is thy servant warned.” The Bible flames with red lights. Every point of danger is marked. Every perilous path has its lamp hung up, warning us not to enter it. We are warned against the Devil and his helpers. We are warned against bad companions, against false teachers, against all wrong courses.

“Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.” There are different kinds of hidden faults. There are those which we try to hide ourselves, which are done in secret. Then there are those which have not been wrought out in act—sins of thought or imagination, which from want of opportunity have never been actually committed. But the reference here is to faults or sins which are hidden from ourselves, of which we are not conscious. We all have faults of which we ourselves are not aware. Perhaps other people see them, although we do not. Certainly God sees them. We may be sure at least that there are faults enough in the best of us. Our aim in Christian life should be so high that we shall desire to be cleansed even from all these hidden faults and sins. No fault is so small as to be a trifle, or not to be a blemish in our character. Small faults grow.

“It is the little rift within the lute  
That by and by will make the music mute,  
And ever widening slowly silence all—  
The little rift within the lover’s lute;  
Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit,  
That rotting inward, slowly moulders all.”

Then we have a beautiful prayer at the close of the Psalm: “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.” There could be no higher standard of life than is set for us in this prayer. The conduct may be blameless while the thoughts are stained with sin. It is easier to keep our acts without fault than our feelings, our desires, our affections. We may do no outward act of cruelty or unkindness, while our hearts are full of jealousies, envies, and all selfishness. We are to seek that our thoughts shall be so white and clean that they will be approved of God. The prayer covers our words, our thoughts, and our meditations, each a closer test than the one before. It is a great thing to be faultless in speech. “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body.” It is a fine achievement to live so that our words shall be acceptable unto God. Perfect grammar is not enough. Our words may be beautiful and graceful, not giving offence, and yet they may be full of hypocrisy, of deceit, of all evil. The

prayer here is that our thoughts may please God. This is a higher spiritual attainment than merely faultless words.

Then, a still higher test of life is our meditation. Meditations are our deepest thoughts, the quiet ponderings of our hearts. Meditation is almost an obsolete word in these times of strenuous activity. The word belongs rather to the days when men had much time to think and think deeply. We meditate when we are alone, when we are shut away from men. Our minds follow then the drift of our own feelings, dispositions, and imaginations. In these moods our inner nature has sway. If our hearts are clean and good, our meditations are pure and holy. But if our hearts are evil and unclean, our meditations are of the same moral quality. Thus they are an infallible test of our real self.

This prayer is, therefore, for a life of the highest character—one acceptable to God, not only in words and thoughts, but also in meditations. Such a life everyone should seek to live who loves God and would be like God.

## PSALM XIX

### THE WAY OF SAFETY

WHO can understand *his* errors? cleanse thou me from *secret faults*.  
13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.—Verses 12, 13.

ROBERT E. SPEER tells of addressing a Sunday school and asking the children what different kinds of sin there are, when a boy raised his hand and answered, "Two kinds, sir." "What are they?" Dr. Speer asked. "Good sins and bad sins." "What are bad sins?" the speaker continued. "Lies," answered the boy. Perhaps the answer was more true than we suppose. Lies certainly are bad sins—possibly they are the worst.

The first sins mentioned here are "hidden faults." "From hidden faults clear thou me." They are secret sins which men commit and of which they know. They think no other one knows of them. Perhaps their friends do not suspect that they are guilty of anything that is not beautiful. They wear the white garment of a fair reputation while under it are spots they would not have the world see. But such sins are not really secret. No sin can be hidden from God. Hidden sins are open to the eye of God. The worst thing any man

can do with his sins is to try to cover them up, to keep on committing them, but concealing them. The only safe thing to do is to confess them and put them out of your life. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper." There is a word which says, "Be sure your sins will find you out." It is not said that your sins will be found out—they may never be in this world—but they will find you out, will plague and torment you, will poison and spoil your life. The only way to deal with sins is to have God cover them, as He does in His forgiveness. Then they never will trouble you again. But no one should ever rest with any secret sin cherished, hidden. Bring it out, repent of it, give it up, and begin a life that is sincere and true. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults" is a prayer for one who is doing anything secretly which he would be ashamed to do openly.

But the words in this little prayer do not refer to sins we are committing knowingly, trying to conceal them from others. They refer to evil things in us of which we ourselves are not aware. "Cleanse thou me from hidden faults." There are in all of us many hidden evil things. There is in every one of us a region which our own eyes cannot see, a desert of our life we never have explored, where evil lurks and hides undiscovered. "Who can discern his errors?" We sometimes say, when we hear of one who has done some evil thing, some dark deed of shame, some hideous crime, perhaps, which brands him with dishonour,



“I could not do that. There is no possibility of such evil in me.” But we would better not say it. We do not know what hidden possibilities of wrongdoing there are in us. You remember what our Lord’s disciples replied when the Master said to them, at the last Supper, “One of you shall betray me.” They did not accuse one another. They did not deny vehemently: “It is not I; I could not commit such a crime.” Each of the disciples was dazed and overwhelmed at the thought of the terrible announcement that one of them should do this thing. “Lord, is it I? It surely cannot be I.” Not one of us dares to say it is not possible for us to do wicked things.

We cannot discern the depths of our own hearts to see what black things are there. Evil lurks in the dark recesses of our nature. It is not enough for us to seek to be cleared of the sins we are aware of, the sins of our habits, the sins of our appetites and passions and lusts, the sins we are conscious of doing; it is necessary for us to have our hearts cleansed of the tendencies to evil that are in us, the evil dispositions of which we are not conscious. Pride is full of hidden faults. Ambition has its unsuspected perils. Love is the noblest, the divinest of all the qualities of our life. God is love, and to love is Godlike; but love, too, carries in itself possibilities of evil. Think of the envies, the jealousies, the bitterness, the anger, the strife, the hatred, and all the degradation and ruin which may come from love. Home

is earth's picture of heaven, but in the sweetest home there are hidden possibilities of peril. We may forget God in the joy and satisfaction of the ideal home. Home's perfections may shut out heaven from our vision.

The hidden, undiscovered evil in our lives and in our environment is most dangerous because it is unsuspected and therefore can not easily be guarded against. There is no prayer that good people, those who desire to live a pure, clean, white, spotless life, need to pray more continually and more earnestly than this: "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." These hidden faults are our greatest peril. They lie unsuspected in our path. They are enemies that we suppose to be friends until suddenly they appear with their hurt for our lives. They are tares among the grain which at first are thought to be wheat, not revealing their true nature till they have done their evil work. We cannot guard ourselves against these hidden evils—we can only ask God to keep us from the harm they may work in us. Every day we should ask God, who sees into our heart's deepest recesses and knows all the hidden evil in us, to search us and find every flaw and fault, every tendency to wrong, the evil in our motives and desires, the peril lurking in our affections, in our appetites and passions, and to keep guard on us continually.

There is also here a prayer to be kept from presumptuous sins. In the Mosaic law a differ-

ence was made between sins of ignorance, sins not intended, and those committed with knowledge and with a high hand. Atonement was provided for the former, but not for presumptuous sins. The prayer of Jesus on His cross for those who were putting Him to death was, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Here the writer prays to be kept from committing presumptuous sins. He knows the danger there is in such sins and so pleads to be held back from them, that is, from willful, conscious, high-handed sins.

Mark the teaching, too, that these presumptuous sins spring out of the minute hidden faults referred to in the previous words. From hidden, obscure, undiscovered faults come presumptuous sins. Medical men tell us that some of the gravest cases of skin disease have been caused by the bite of a fly or a mosquito. Very serious ailments oft-times come from very slight ones. In the spiritual life the same is true. A slight moral weakness grows into an evil tendency, and the tendency indulged develops into a loathsome vice, and the vice ripens into a presumptuous sin. Sow a thought and you will reap an act; sow an act and you will reap a habit; sow a habit and you will reap a character; sow character and you will reap a destiny.

We need to guard against carelessness concerning little sins. We may not suppose that because our life is sweet and pure and innocent, in the joy and gladness of youth, of boyhood or girlhood,

there is no danger that ever we can be hurt by sin. We have seen many a beautiful dream of young life spoiled. The hidden fault lurking in the nature has grown into the presumptuous sin. Young people do not begin to know the peril of little sins, and how soon they may disfigure and destroy all their moral beauty.

There are some people who are always wooing danger. Sin seems to have a fascination for them. One of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer is, "Lead us not into temptation." We have to meet temptation oftentimes in our paths of duty. The men cannot go through a day of business without being tempted many times. The women cannot live a day amid their holiest home duties and among their truest friends without temptation. But we should never dare to meet temptation unless it comes in the path of our divine guidance—unless it must be passed through in duty. To expose ourselves needlessly to temptation is presumption. Yet there are many who do this. They play with fire and wonder why they are burned. They take unfit companionships into their lives and then pay the penalty in moral and spiritual ruin. They dally with sin in its beginnings and end in shameful degradation at the last.

One of the temptations of Jesus was to presumption. The tempter suggested that He cast Himself down from a lofty pinnacle into the street, depending upon the divine protection and claiming a divine promise of angel guardianship. But

God had never bidden Him do this and there really was no promise for such uncalled-for risk. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," answered Jesus. We dare not presume to ask God's help in any venture or risk unless we have God's command to make the risk. If you needlessly run in the way of contagious disease, if you insist on entering a room where a child is sick with diphtheria, when you have no duty there as physician or nurse, you cannot claim divine protection. But if your duty calls into the presence of the most contagious diseases, you dare not refuse to go. Then God will keep you.

The same is true of moral contagion. You may not dally with danger. The practice of young girls and young men going into the slums to hold meetings to try to save fallen and outcast ones has no warrant in any true or wise Christian evangelism. No doubt we are to be ready to lose our lives in serving Christ and our fellows in missionary service, but the Master would not send young, inexperienced disciples into the perils of the slums; He would have older and more experienced ones for such a field.

"Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins" is a prayer we need to have always on our lips and in our hearts. The risk may seem to be a pious one, and the service into which a man ventures may seem to be heroic, and yet we may commit a presumptuous sin in entering upon it. We can have God's shelter and help only when

God unmistakably sends us into the danger. We dare not go into danger unless we are divinely sent. If it is our duty, we dare not withhold ourselves. No earthly danger can touch us if God sends us, for then we are panoplied in steel and no harm can come to us. But unless we are led by the Spirit, as our Master was when He went into the desert to be tempted by the Devil, we dare not go.

After the prayers, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults," and "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins," comes this expression of confidence, "Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." The course of sin is terrible. The little beginning grows into appalling consequences. If we do not have our hidden faults, the undiscovered evils of our natures, cleared, guarded, they will develop into presumptuous sins. But if we are shielded and led in true ways, our lives shall be kept upright, clean, and pure. So we have here the secret of a beautiful life. The world is full of evil, but we may pass through it all so sheltered, so protected that not a breath of harm shall touch us. When He sent His disciples forth, Jesus said of them, "They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them." Wherever God sends us, whatever the perils may be, we are as safe as if we were in heaven.

This is one side of the truth. But if we pay

no heed to the law of God, if we rush into perils unsent, we go without divine protection. Be afraid of sin and temptation. Pray continually, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." God discerns these hidden and obscure faults in you—ask Him to keep them under His omnipotent protection, to cleanse the evil He sees in them and make you pure and holy throughout. Pray also, " 'Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins.' Do not allow these germs of sin, these hidden evils in me to develop into actual sins, into open wickedness." Living thus you will be immune and may pass through the world safe and unharmed—dangers ever about you, but through divine enfolding secure as though you were in heaven itself.

## PSALM XXIII

### THE SHEPHERD PSALM

**THE Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.—Verses 1-6.**

**THE** Twenty-third Psalm is the most familiar passage in the Bible. It is the children's Psalm, memorized first of all the Scriptures by countless thousands. It is the Psalm of the sick room, dear to the hearts of sufferers, because of the divine tenderness revealed in the words. It is the Psalm of the deathbed. Rarely does a Christian pass from earth without repeating the words, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." It is the Psalm of old age.

"The Lord is my shepherd." Shepherd seems a homely name for God, yet when we know the story of shepherd life in the East, it is a very fitting name. The shepherd lives with his sheep.



He guards them by night. He defends them when they are in danger. He leads them out to find pasture. He takes the little lambs and the weary ones in his arms and carries them. He seeks the lost or straying ones. He even gives his life in protecting them. When we know all this about the shepherd, we see how the name interprets God to us.

“The Lord is my shepherd.” It would not be the same to us if the words ran, “The Lord is a shepherd.” He might be a shepherd to a great many people, all that that rich word means, and yet not be anything comforting to me. But if I can say with joy, “The Lord is *my* shepherd,” I can sing the song through to the end.

“The Lord is my shepherd.” The present tenses of the Bible are rich in their meanings. That is the way the promises and assurances of the Scriptures are written. “The Eternal God is thy refuge”—not was. It might, then, have been true a year ago, yesterday, but not to be true now. The other day one was speaking of a person and said: “He used to be my friend. He was a great deal to me, did much for me. I went to him with my perplexities, my trials, my questions. But he is not my friend any more. He passed me yesterday on the street and did not even look at me.” That is not the way with God. “The eternal God is my refuge; underneath are”—not were, not will be—that is too indefinite,—“Underneath are the everlasting arms.” “The

Lord is our refuge." "Lo, I am with you always." "My grace is sufficient for thee." "The Lord is my shepherd." There will never come a moment when you cannot say this. "Loved once" is never said of Christ. He loves unto the end.

"I shall not want." The other day a man said, "I have a good portion of money laid up for my old age, enough to keep my wife and me as long as we expect to live." Yes, but that is not a sure portion. Earth's bags all have holes. The writer of this Psalm did not say, "I have plenty of good investments; therefore I shall not want." This is what he said, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and therefore I shall not want." When we have God, there is nothing we may ever need that He cannot and will not give us. When we do not have God we are pitifully poor though we are millionaires. When we can say, "God is mine," we are rich.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." Pastures are for nourishment. In the East the matter of provision was always a serious one. There was but little rain and oftentimes the fields were parched so that pasture could not be found. Then the shepherd would lead his flock away, mile after mile, till they found in some quiet nook, in some shaded valley, green, lush grass.

Rest also is implied in these words—"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." The sheep are fed and satisfied, and then they lie

down to rest. We cannot go on forever in strenuous activities, and God is gracious and kind to us, giving us many quiet resting places on the way. Night is one of these places. We leave the toil and struggle of the day and draw aside to rest. The Sabbath is another resting place which God has ordained for us.

Sometimes there are enforced rests. "He *maketh* me to lie down in green pastures." We do not want to rest. We think our work needs us, that we would be losing time if we stopped even a day. Then the Good Shepherd makes us lie down, because He knows we need the rest to renew our strength. We are not doing our work well. The joy is fading out of our heart. One was speaking the other day of a Christian man who was formerly a model of patience, kindness, and peace. "He is growing irritable and querulous," the friend said. "He has none of his old patience with people. He seems cold and stern." He has been living so strenuously, driven by his work, that he has grown nervous and easily vexed. He needs to lie down in the green pastures. Perhaps more of us than think so need to be made to lie down to feed and rest. Perhaps we are doing more work, running to more meetings, giving more money, talking more about religion, yet losing in peace, in sweetness of spirit, which is the real test of spiritual life.

The shepherd makes his sheep lie down that they may get rested and grow strong and beauti-

ful in their spirit. That is what the Good Shepherd does with us sometimes, when we fall sick, for instance. We think we have not time to rest and yet He calls us aside and draws the curtains, and shuts us in. Notice, it is in the green pastures that the shepherd makes his sheep lie down, and we find our sick room a bit of pasture. A friend who had been in the hospital several weeks and was convalescing, wrote, "I have found my little white cot here in this quiet room a bit of God's green pasture." He never makes us lie down on the rough hillside, or on the dusty road, or among the rocks; it is always in the soft, rich grass, where we may feed while we rest.

Be sure you do not miss the blessing of sickness, of sorrow, of trial of any kind. God wants you to grow in sweetness, in patience, in trust, in joy, in peace, in all gentleness and kindness, whenever He makes you lie down in the green pastures.

"He leadeth me beside the still waters." Green pastures suggest provision—the sheep must be fed. The streams of water suggest drink—the flock must have water. So the shepherd leads them to where the brooks flow. Often in the Old Testament we have the picture of the shepherd watering his sheep. Jacob found Rachel watering her father's flocks at the well. Moses found his future wife drawing water for the flocks of Jethro. Our Shepherd leads His sheep to the waters of quietness, that they may drink and be refreshed.

The Syrian shepherd sometimes led his flock up steep paths, over rough roads, through dark gorges, but it never was to make the way hard for them—it always was to take them to a bit of green pasture or beside still waters, that they might be fed and refreshed. Sometimes we fret and chafe when we have had hard experiences. We are sick, or our work is hard, or we have keen disappointments or sore losses. We wonder why God takes us by such a painful and wearisome way. Have you ever thought that He is leading you along these rough paths that you may come to green pastures, to streams of water? At the end of every steep pinch of road, beyond every day of struggle or pain, a blessing waits for you, something that will enrich you, make you stronger, holier, less selfish, more helpful.

“He restoreth my soul.” There may be several meanings in these words. A wolf may fly upon the flock and one of them may be torn. The shepherd takes the poor hurt sheep into his tender care and nurses it, as if it were a child, until it is well again, its wound healed, and the sheep restored. Or, in the hot sun one of the flock may faint in the road and sink down, unable to go any farther. Does the shepherd leave it there to perish, while he leads the stronger ones on in the way? No, he cares for the fainting one, he takes it up in his arms, lays it in his bosom, and carries it till it is rested and able to walk again. Or, one of the sheep may drop out of the flock and

wander away. Does the shepherd let the lost one go, giving it no thought, not even missing it? No, one of the most pathetic stories in the Bible tells of the shepherd leaving the ninety and nine and going away to the mountains to find the one sheep of his that was lost. Then, you remember that exquisite picture, at the end of the story, of the shepherd finding his sheep, laying it on his shoulder, and carrying it back to the fold.

All these are illustrations of the words, "He restoreth my soul," and all suggest ways in which our Good Shepherd restores us. We are fallen upon by the prowling wild beasts of temptation, wounded, torn, hurt almost to death. The Shepherd with infinite gentleness and patience heals us, restores us. Or we faint by the way, get discouraged, and sink down. The Shepherd comes, bends over us, comforts us, speaks brave words of cheer to us, not giving us up, but getting us on our feet again, with a new hope and courage. Or, we err and go astray, like lost sheep, and the Shepherd follows us to the mountains and seeks us till He finds us and then restores us. If this little clause had been left out of this Psalm, much of its beauty would have been lost. It is because the Shepherd restoreth my soul, not once, but a thousand times, that I am going to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Very beautiful is that line in Dr. Matheson's hymn, "O Love, that will not let me go." No other love would suf-

face. If our Shepherd ever wearied of us, we could not be saved. "He restoreth my soul."

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness." We need guidance. We do not know which way in life to choose. We do not know where this path or that one will lead us, if we follow it. One day the Empress of Austria was driving out in her carriage, when she saw a woman acting strangely. She seemed to be bewildered, not knowing where she was going. The empress left her carriage and went to the old woman and found that she was blind and was groping within a few feet of a precipice. We all need guidance. If we will, we may have it, too, and walk in God's right way. It may not be the easy way,—but it will lead us home.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." This means a peculiarly dark and gloomy valley, a deep gorge, into which the sunlight never pours. We have grown accustomed to applying this verse to death. But there are darker valleys in this world than the valley of death. There are sorrows worse than bereavements. Here are two homes where hearts are bowed. In one there has been no crape on the door. None of the neighbours know there is any grief there. Things are going on, to all external appearance, just as usual. But in that household there is a sorrow black and terrible. One life, fair

and beautiful heretofore, honoured and happy, has been touched by shame, and all the home lives are stricken with a bitterness which no comfort can alleviate. The other home has been marked recently with heavy crape. People passing felt their hearts grow tender and lowered their voices. One day the house was thronged with neighbours and friends who came together to say their farewell. But there was no bitterness in any heart in that household. The sorrow was turned to joy by the Christian hope that filled every breast. Which of these two homes is the real valley of the shadow of death?

“For thou art with me.” The sheep need never fear any evil when the shepherd is with them. A Christian man tells of an experience of his boyhood which illustrates this. He worked several miles from home. Saturday night he worked late, and then went home to be with his loved ones for the Sunday. On the way was one very dark valley, between two hills. No star shone into it, and there was no light from any window. It was called “the valley of shadows,” and sometimes men lay in hiding to rob persons passing through. The boy was at the blackest point of this lonely, dreary way one Saturday night, brave yet trembling, fairly leaping over the road, when he heard—a hundred yards before him—a voice strong, clear, and full of cheer, calling, “Is that you, John?” Instantly he knew the voice. It was his father’s. The good man knew



that on that black night his son would have a hard ordeal in coming home through the valley, and so with a father's love he was there to meet him at the blackest point in the way. All fear vanished when the boy heard the voice and recognized it. Does not this illustrate how God's children are comforted when they enter the valley of shadows? The way seems dark and strange. They have never passed through it before. But as they enter it they hear a voice calling their name, and then see a Presence of Love. "Fear not," the voice says, "I am with thee." Then all fear vanishes. As human faces fade out, the face of the Good Shepherd will appear, radiant with peace and warm with love, and all dread will vanish. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."

We need not linger on the other words of this Psalm. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." There are dangers on every side, but the shepherd is not deterred by these from caring for his sheep. Our Good Shepherd is Master of the world, stronger than all enemies, Conqueror of all, and is able to provide for His sheep in any place. We remember that Jesus spread a table for His disciples the night of His betrayal, and we know in what peace He fed them, with enemies plotting, scheming, gathering for His arrest. No one could disturb Him or them till the meal was over.

“Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.” God does not want us to go through this world with sad faces. He wants us to rejoice.

“My cup runneth over.” A writer tells of a friend who literally kept a daily book account with the Lord. On one side he put down all he did for God; on the other side he put down what the Lord did for him. If a friend helped or cheered him, he put that down. If he was sick and then was restored, he put it down. All favours and mercies he recorded. After a few weeks of this book-keeping he gave it up. “It’s no use,” he said, “I can never get a balance. I am always hopelessly in debt.” That is the story of every life—the divine goodness overflows.

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” All the past has been goodness; all the future will be goodness. Goodness and loving-kindness from God all the days—the dark days and the days of pain, the days of disappointment, the days of sickness, the day when death comes to your home, the day of the funeral—goodness and loving-kindness all the days of my life—then—“I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” All the days of this life, goodness and loving-kindness, but that is not the end; indeed, that is only the beginning. “I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

A mother came a thousand miles to the hospital to see her boy, who was dying. When she

reached the office the doctor said the boy was sleeping and must not be disturbed. It might kill him. She must wait till he wakened. The mother begged to be allowed to go in and sit beside his cot—she would not speak to him. As she sat there her heart grew hungry and she reached out her hand and laid it gently on his brow. He did not waken, but instead he said, “Mother, you have come.” And at once he began to recover. Christ lays His hand of love on the heads of suffering ones, weary ones, burdened, sorrowing ones, to-day. This Psalm is the blessed hand of Christ to you. Do you not feel it?

“I lay my hand on your aching brow,—  
Softly, so! And the pain grows still.  
The moisture clings to my soothing palm,  
And you sleep because I will.

“You forget I am here! ’Tis the darkness hides.  
I am always here and your needs I know.  
I tide you over the long, long night,  
To the shores of the morning glow.

“So God’s hand touches the aching soul,—  
Softly, so! And the pain is still;  
All grief and woe from the soul He draws,  
And we rest because He wills.

“We forget, and yet He is always here!  
He knows our minds and He heeds our sighs;  
No night so long but He soothes and stills  
Till the dawn-light rims the skies.”

## PSALM XXXI

### INTO THY HANDS

INTO thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me.—  
Verse 5.

THESE words are often quoted as if they were for the hour of death. Indeed, Jesus did use them as His last words on the cross, and they are fit words for any dying saint. But here the committal is for life, with its experiences.

The words imply complete surrender. They are suitable for the beginning of a Christian life, just such words as one should use who accepts of Christ and devotes himself to Him as Saviour and Lord. If any are asking what one is to do to be saved, here is the answer. Commit yourself, body and soul, for time and for eternity, into the hands of Jesus Christ.

This committing of oneself means the committing also of one's affairs into the hands of Christ. Some people trust Christ as their Saviour, but do not commit to Him the interests of their everyday life. Yet life commonly is full of experiences which no human wisdom can make clear. We cannot choose our own ways. We cannot tell what will be the effect on our lives one

year, ten years, thirty years hence, of a certain decision or choice which we make to-day. The only safe thing to do is to put all this into the hands of One who is wiser than we are.

A pastor was sitting at a little child's bedside with the anxious parents. It seemed that the child could not live. They were about to pray, and the pastor said to the parents, "What shall we ask God to do for your child?" He had been speaking of God's love and wisdom, telling them that their Heavenly Father makes no mistakes, that whatever He does will be right, that He knows what is best for the child and for them. So when he said, "What shall we ask God to do?" there was silence for a moment; then the father answered in sobs, "We dare not choose—leave it to Him." He could not have said a wiser, safer thing. No human parent can tell what is best for his child, whether to stay in this world and meet the battles, temptations, dangers, trials, or to be lifted over into the heavenly life, where there shall be no trial, no temptation, no peril.

It would be wise if we would trust God in the same way with all our affairs, never asking too earnestly, too importunately, certainly never in-submissively, but leaving to God what He knows to be best.

Christ teaches us the same lesson. He exhorts us never to be anxious. He points to the lilies and the birds. Your Father cares for the birds and clothes the lilies; much more will He care for

and clothe you, His child. The other day one said, "I have at last learned how to live—just by the day. I used to worry about the future, looking far on into the years; now I have learned Christ's lesson—never to be anxious for the morrow, but to live as beautifully and as faithfully as I can to-day.

"Lord, for to-morrow and its needs,  
I do not pray;  
Keep me, my God, from stain of sin  
Just for to-day."

"Into thine hand." Of course, in a sense, God has no hands. He is a spirit—and a spirit hath not flesh and bones. Yet all through the Scriptures the hands of God are spoken of in a human way. Then Jesus Christ came, the Son of God, revealing in human life the gentleness, the mercy, the helpfulness of God. We may speak, therefore, of the hands of Christ as the hands of God. What wonderful hands they were!

They were gentle hands. They never caused pain to anyone. The other day in the hospital a friend who had passed through a serious operation spoke with much feeling of the gentleness of the surgeon, how kind he had been, how careful his touch. But no most kindly surgeon ever dealt so softly with a wounded or diseased body as Jesus dealt with wounded or sick hearts. No mother's hands were ever so careful with her child as were the hands of Christ in His touches

upon the weak, the troubled. We may trust ourselves absolutely to those hands, and know they will never hurt us. A prophet said of Him before He came, "A bruised reed shall he not break." What could be more worthless than a reed? Then a bruised reed—of what little value is it? Yet the hand of Christ is so gentle that He will not even break off the reed that is bruised. We may trust our hearts in their sorrow, our spirits when crushed, our lives when bruised, to those hands, knowing that we will be most tenderly cared for.

The hands of Christ were strong hands. While more gentle than a mother's, they were omnipotent in their strength. At their lightest touch, diseases fled away, the dead were brought back to life, the fruitless tree was withered to its roots, the wild storm was quieted in a moment, and the turbulent waves of the sea sobbed themselves into perfect calm at the Master's feet.

There is nothing that the hands of Christ could not do. At the end He said, "I have overcome the world; all the powers of nature, all the powers of evil, even the mighty sovereignty of death, stand subdued." Surely we may entrust ourselves, with all our needs, weaknesses, dangers, into the hands of this strong Son of God. No enemy ever can overcome us when He is keeping us. No hurt can touch us when He is defending us. A mountain guide said to a tourist, who was timid about crossing some dangerous spot, "This hand never lost a man." The strongest

human hand may sometimes fail us, but the hand of God never shall. We may trust it implicitly and without fear.

Christ's hands were saving hands. The weak, the weary, the troubled, the sorrowing, the sinful, all came to Christ, and never one that came to Him went away unhelped or unblessed. A penitent woman crept to His feet out of her sin, and His hand touched her, cleansed her, and set her among the redeemed. An artist painted a picture of the woman who was a sinner, and wrote a sonnet about her. The picture represents a woman passing through the street in all the flash and gaiety of her class. Glancing up at a window, she sees the face of Jesus. Suddenly her life is withered into nothingness. Then she cries out in words which the artist puts into his sonnet:

O, loose me, seest thou not my Bridegroom's face  
That draws me to Him? For His feet, my kiss,  
My hair, my tears He craves to-day:—and oh!  
What words can tell what other day and place  
Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of His?  
He needs me—calls me—loves me—let me go.

She had seen Christ, and one glimpse of His holy face had consumed all the old sin, at the same time starting in her a new womanhood, pure, true, and beautiful. Thus always the hand of Christ can take the vilest sinner, blot out his sins, and build up new beauty in him.

The hands of Christ were safe hands. They



never gave a wrong touch. They never led any one in the wrong way. Human friendship is short-sighted. The mother, in all her tenderness of heart, may do mistaken and foolish things for her child. The love may be most delicate and considerate, most strong and firm, and yet love does not always know what is best.

No responsibility in life is more serious than that under which we come when we take another life into our hands. This is true of the physician or the surgeon to whom we entrust ourselves for treatment in physical needs. Life is full of experiences in which with the utmost gentleness and strength there is also the necessity for something more than human. A baby is born and is laid in the mother's arms. In its feebleness it says to her, with its first cry, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit. Guard my life. Teach me my lessons. Train and discipline my powers. Educate me until I reach the strength of mind and heart and life which God wishes me to attain. Hide me from the world's harm. Let no evil thing touch me. Prepare me for this life and for eternity." Can there be any more serious responsibility in life than this? Every mother that thinks at all knows that she, herself, with her weakness and ignorance, cannot keep her child's life. Her hands are not skillful enough, not strong enough.

Christian parents, conscious of their own weakness and lack of wisdom and skill, bring their

little ones and put them into the hands of Christ, that He may guard them, teach them, and train them. The very language of their act is, "Into thine hand, O Christ, I commit my child. I cannot take care of it myself. Wilt thou keep it for me?" Then the parents' part is faithfulness in all duty to the child—example, teaching, restraining, guidance, training; to make the home atmosphere like the climate of heaven about the child's soul. God comes to the little child first in the mother. As Father Tabb says:

The baby has no skies  
 But mother's eyes,  
 Nor any God above  
 But mother's love.  
 His angel sees the Father's face,  
 But he the mother's, full of grace;  
 And yet the heavenly kingdom is  
 Of such as these.

Blessed is the mother who truly interprets Christ in her keeping and training of her child.

The same is true in its own measure in any human friendship. Think of the responsibility of being a friend! It is a sacred moment when God sends to you one to whom you are to be guide and guardian, one who trusts you, loves you, and comes under your influence. We are responsible for everything we do which may colour, impress, or sway our new friend's life. If our influence is tainted, if we fail to be absolutely true in our

words or acts, very serious will our accounting be when we stand before God.

So is it when any of us commit our own life to the love, the guiding care of another. Pure, wise, good, and rich human friendship is wondrously benign. But no human friend is perfect. None is wise enough to choose the right things for us. None is wise enough to help us always in the truest and best ways. Some of the saddest wrecks in life have come through mistakes in choosing friends. A gentle, unsuspecting girl trusts herself under the influence of one in whom she believes, but who proves unworthy, dragging her down to sorrow. Then even the sweetest and best human friends can stay with us only a little while. There is only one Friend to whom we can say with absolute confidence, "Into thy hands I commit my life, unto the end, for thou canst guard me from stumbling and present me faultless before God at the last." The hands of Christ are safe and sure, both for present and eternal keeping. I am glad I have a Friend who will take me as I am, make me what I ought to be, then guard and guide me through all possible experiences and bring me at last to heaven's gate without blemish.

Christ's hands are eternal. They never will be folded in death's stillness. Beautiful are those words in Deuteronomy, "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Human arms may be strong and gentle, and may hold us fast in love's em-

brace to-day, but to-morrow they will be folded in the stillness of death, and we can find no comfort in them. One of the saddest things one ever sees is a little child crying bitterly by its mother's coffin. Heretofore the cry was never in vain, but now there is no answer. But the hands into which we are asked to commit the keeping of our lives are everlasting.

Jesus used these words when He was dying. He was about to pass into the strange mysteries of the valley of shadows. It was an unfamiliar way to Him—He had never gone that way before. But He was not afraid. So He said, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit." That was all dying meant to Him. That is all dying will be to us if we are in the keeping of Christ—only the breathing out of our spirit into the hands of our Redeemer. When we watch our friends passing out from us, it seems to us that they will be lonely, that they will be overwhelmed with the strangeness of the way. But no—a face like our own face will beam its love upon them the moment the human faces vanish from their vision. A hand like our own hand will clasp theirs the moment our hand lets go its clasp. We talk about the dark valley, but there is no dark valley for those who love Christ. Dying for a believer is only coming up closer to Jesus Christ. We need not dread to lay our loved ones into His hands. He will take most gentle care of them, and will give them back to us in radiant beauty, when we come to

the time of our home-going. George Klinge puts it thus:

We are quite sure  
That He will give them back—  
Bright, pure and beautiful;  
We know He will but keep  
Our own and His until we fall asleep;  
We know He does not mean  
To break the strands reaching between  
The Here and There.  
He does not mean—though heaven be fair—  
To change the spirits entering there  
That they forget  
The eyes upraised and wet,  
The lips too still for prayer,  
The mute despair.  
He will not take  
The spirits which He gave, and make  
The glorified so new  
That they are lost to me and you.

This is our lesson,—for life, for death, the hands of Christ, our Redeemer. Life is full of danger—it is never easy to live in this world. It is never easy to send our children out into a world, of whose danger and evil we know so much and yet so little. Many a mother dreads to have her child go out from her safe and gentle home of love, even for an hour, to meet other children in the streets. The future is all dark to us. We know not what lies before us any moment. Here is the only ground of confidence and peace—“Into

thy hands I commit my spirit." Into Thy hands, all blessed Christ, I commit my dear ones, my friends. Into Thy hands, Thou Redeemer of men, I will commit my spirit as I enter the unseen world. "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

## PSALM XXXI

### REFUGE FROM THE HURT OF TONGUES

*O*h how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; *which* thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! 20 Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavillon from the strife of tongues.—Verses 19, 20.

THE writer of this Psalm had suffered from people's talk. It had broken upon him like missiles of war, like arrows shot through the air. The evil that is in the human tongue is described in the Psalms in very strong language. "Under his tongue is mischief and vanity." "Thy tongue frameth deceit." "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent." The writer had heard the slanders of many who took counsel together against him. He speaks here of the "strife of tongues"—a continual warfare of words going on about him.

"The strife of tongues!" How expressive the words are! We all know more or less about it. Few people escape the hurt of tongues in their own life. Who is there that is not hurt at some time by slander! No name is pure enough to be

forever safe against vile insinuations, cruel aspersions. Even the Lord Jesus, whose life was perfect, holy, harmless, did not escape the slanderer's tongue.

It is strange how many bitter and unloving words are spoken in this world. The tongue is a little member, but it is a source of much evil. St. James tells us that while all kinds of animals have been tamed, no man can tame the human tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. We do not live long in this world till we find that these words are true. On the smallest provocation men become angry and speak violent words. There are homes in which the chief talk is strife—the strife of tongues. There are children, children with gentle souls, who have to grow up in the midst of such a strife, hearing scarcely ever a loving word. The hurt of such sharp, bitter words is very sore.

“The ill-timed truth we might have kept,—  
Who knows how sharp it pierced and stung?”

Even the truth about us may be so told as to be inhumanly cruel in its effects. Then, often, it is not truth perverted, but falsehood, that bars the arrow. The human tongue often secretes gall. You have heard envy talk. You have heard the mad ravings of jealousy. You have heard the vituperations of anger. You have heard the bitter threatenings of revengeful passion. And every word is a missile of death.



“On the dull silence breaking  
With a lightning-flash, a word,  
Bearing endless desolation  
On its blighting wings, I heard;  
Earth can forge no keener weapon,  
Dealing surer death and pain;  
And the cruel echo answered  
Through long years again.”

There is a strife of tongues about us even when the words are not spoken against us. Think of all the speech one must hear as the days go by, speech that is not loving, not helpful, not encouraging, not comforting. The gift of speech is one of the noblest that God has given to man. It was meant to be loving, true, wise, enriching, and full of blessing. God gave us our tongues that with them we might speak to Him in praise and prayer and to our fellow men in love, in hope, in all gracious, helpful, encouraging words.

But what is the major part of the conversation that goes on in parlours, in clubs, during walks and rides? Is it wise, good, wholesome, useful talk? Does it instruct, interest, inspire, stimulate? Is it upon important subjects? We know how idle much of it is. People chatter on forever and say not one wise word. How much of the social talk of any day or evening is worth writing down, worth remembering, worth printing? Yet we cannot get away from this strife of tongues.

The speech about us is full of misrepresentations, too; reflections on others, innuendoes, sus-

pictions, criticisms, censures. It is strange how much of the talk we hear is about the absent, and with what ruthless unconcern people say evil things of those who are not present to hear. Characters are discussed and dissected as if they were nothing more than bits of clay. Names are taken up and gossiping tongues whisper their hints of scandal even concerning those whom an hour ago they were praising obsequiously. It is the rarest thing that a full, hearty, honest word is spoken of any absent one. Evermore this sad and cruel chatter about people goes on in society. You cannot but hear it, for you are not deaf. But if you are honourable, true-hearted, and charitable, these words hurt you, and you need a refuge from them.

“The pride of man, and the strife of tongues!” How truly these words picture the life which is about every one of us! And men and women with sensitive spirits grow weary of it, and long to flee away to some quiet retreat, where they shall no longer be hurt by the unending strife of tongues. They grow weary of angry words, of false words, of censorious words, of words of suspicion and backbiting, of words of wrangling and quarreling, So much inharmonious talk hurts us. We grow tired of hearing criticism and faultfinding. It worries and frets us to be nagged at continually.

The words of the Psalm tell us of the refuge we want from all this strife and confusion of words: “Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt

keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." A refuge has been provided into which we may flee, where we shall not be hurt by this strife. How may we find it?

It is not by falling in, ourselves, with all this stream of talk that we escape its hurt. That is our danger. When we are with those who have only idle words, empty chit-chat forever on their tongues, it is easy for us to join them in the frivolous speech. When we hear others gossiping about their neighbours, telling bits of news, repeating derogatory stories, hinting suspicious things, we find it very natural to find a sort of pleasure in it all, and then add our portion to the common stock. When we are with persons who are saying unkindly things of some one, casting arrows of censure, sneer, or aspersion at the good name of an absent person, making his faults a subject of conversation, holding a sort of clinic over his character and dissecting it for their own cruel delight, how easily we slip into the same groove of talk, unless we are most watchful! Have you ever caught yourself doing this, even laughing at the things people were saying about some dear friend of yours, and even adding little savoury bits which your confidential relation of friendship had permitted you to learn about your friend? Or when you find yourself among those who are wrangling about questions, or quarreling about creeds, politics, or something else, it is not hard for you to take a side and contend and wrangle as vigorously as the others. In a home where

there is strife, we are always in danger of taking part in it and adding to it the bitterness of our own excited and exciting words. This is not the refuge from the strife of tongues which God provides. It is no refuge at all. It may be the easiest thing, just to drop into the stream and drift on with it; but we are only hurt if we join in sin ourselves to save ourselves from the evil of other men's sins. This is only deserting our colours and going over to the enemy. It pleases the adversary, but it grieves the Saviour.

Then we may not seek a refuge from the strife of tongues in indifference and contempt. If the talk we hear concerns ourselves and is critical and condemnatory, we should do well first to ask whether it is true, or whether the things said of us may not have at least some shadow of truth in them. There is an element of wholesomeness in living in an atmosphere of criticism. Too much praise is not good for us. If everyone always spoke well of us, commending and flattering us continually, it would make us proud and self-conceited. It is well that there always are those about us who are ready to see our blemishes and to expose them. We should never know our faults if this were not so. Francis Quarles said: "If any speak ill of thee, flee home to thy own conscience and examine thy heart. If thou be guilty, it is a just correction; if not guilty, it is a fair instruction. Make use of both. So shalt thou distill honey out of gall, and out of an open enemy create a secret friend."

Further, the divine refuge from the strife of tongues is not found in flight from the living world. Men have run away to the covert of the rocks and the caverns, to the monastery, to the hermit's cell, to escape the strife of tongues. But that is not the way God wants us to do. He wants us to be in the world and yet not of the world. He needs us in the midst of society, for He desires us to witness for Him. We are to let our light shine upon the world's darkness, to dispel it. We are to live among those who are not good, to show them a pattern of true and beautiful living. Our duty bids us stay where we are. We have a mission there. God needs us in the place where He has planted us. Refuge by flight would be fleeing from duty, and we should both prove disloyal to our Master and fail in our search for shelter by such a course.

But there is a shelter that we can find in the very midst of the trouble. "Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." They tell us that when the terrible cyclone sweeps over a country, there is a spot at its very center which is so quiet and still that a leaf is scarcely stirred, where a baby might sleep undisturbed and secure. So at the center of the sorest strife of tongues you may find a pavilion, a place of peace, where no hurt can come to you. Take the case of one who must endure abuse, reviling, unjust and bitter words in any form. Few of us go through many years of life without meeting experiences of this kind.

Some time the tongue of the slanderer will assail us. There is a story that once three young Hebrews were cast into a furnace of fire, but came from the flames untouched, not carrying on their garments even the smell of fire. That was better than if God had kept them altogether out of the fire. We may not keep ourselves from the furnace of burning words, but God will keep us, if we will accept the refuge, from suffering harm in the furnace.

Part of this refuge must be in the consciousness that we are blameless of wrong. This is a wonderful secret of peace in the heart in the time when others are speaking evil of us. If the things they say are true, there is no refuge save in the mercy and grace of God. But when our own conscience testifies that we are innocent, there is a secret peace in our own breast which no false words can destroy.

Another element in this refuge must be the keeping of love in our heart. Slander or bitter words of any kind can harm us only when we yield to the feeling of resentment and anger. So long as we continue loving through all the strife of tongues, we are hidden away in a safe refuge. It is impatience that opens the door of the refuge and lets harm in. Sin is not in being tempted, but in yielding to temptation. Our Lord taught us to pray for those who despitely use us and persecute us. While we pray for them, their cruel words have no power to hurt us.

In no other way can this lesson be taught so well as by looking at the example of Christ. Never about any other life did the strife of tongues wage as it did about Him. Men's cruelty knew no limit. Poisoned tongues emptied their envenomed bitterness upon Him. But none of this rage and bitterness disturbed Him. You know the secrets. There were two—love and peace. His heart was full of love, and the peace of God guarded Him.

We should understand these secrets. If we truly love men, we will not be affected by cruel words. They will hurt and sting, but they will not embitter us. We will forgive injury and wrong. We will answer back hate with kindness, rudeness with gentleness. Then if we have love in our heart, we will seek ever to allay bitterness in others. One of our Master's beatitudes is, "Blessed are the peacemakers." We can do much to lessen the strife of tongues by always speaking gently ourselves.

Dr. Parkhurst, in his little book on "The Sunny Side of Christianity," tells this story: "One day on a trolley car there was a door . . . that squeaked every time it was opened or shut. A workman, sitting near it, noticed this. Rising, he took a little can from his pocket, let fall a drop of oil on the offending spot, and sat down, saying, 'I always carry an oil can in my pocket, for there are so many squeaky things that a drop of oil will set right.'"

Love carries an oil can and is ready every-

where to lubricate squeaking things. We all know a few men and women who are ever dropping oil to soften friction, and smoothing and quieting strife among others. They have some gentle word, some happy suggestion, some bit of humour, some way of changing the subject, when there is danger of strife. Blessings on the people who carry oil cans in their pockets! Not only do they add immeasurably to the world's sweetness, but they have found a refuge for themselves from the strife of tongues. Love is the secret. It was Christ's secret. Amid hate and cruelty He loved on. If we keep gentle, patient, sweet, forgiving, and loving, the wildest clamour of harsh and angry voices will not disturb us. Our soft answer will turn away wrath. Your good will overcome evil.

The Christian way to resist the strife of tongues is with love. If anyone speaks evil of you, say something good of him in return. If the other person is angry, keep patient and sweet. If another has bitter words to say of an absent person, your task is to say a kind word of him. It was said of Starr King that if anyone did him an unkindness, or said a hard or bitter word of him, that was the very man he loved. His heart went out to him in yearning, and he would find ways to conquer him by love.

That is what it is to be a Christian. That is the Christian way to quarrel—throw roses for stones; overcome evil with good. O for a Church that would honestly try this way of living with



people! If your rights are not quite respected—why, no matter! Just keep on loving. Love is the great secret refuge from the strife of tongues.

The other secret of Christ's quiet was the peace of God in His heart. Nothing unkind or cruel could reach Him, hidden away as He was in the bosom of His Father, in the secret place of the Most High, under the shadow of the Almighty. When the winds are wildly raging over the sea, far down beneath the surface is a place where perfect stillness reigns.

“So to the heart that knows Thy love, O Purest,  
There is a temple, sacred evermore,  
And the babble of earth's angry voices  
Dies in hushed silence at its peaceful door.

“Far, far away, the rear of passion dieth,  
And loving thoughts rise calm and peacefully,  
And no rude storm, how fierce soe'er it flieth,  
Disturbs the soul that dwells, O Lord in Thee.

“Oh, rest of rest! Oh, peace serene, eternal!  
Thou ever livest; and Thou changest never;  
And in the secret of Thy presence dwelleth  
Fullness of joy forever and forever.”

“Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.”

## PSALM XXXII

### DAVID'S JOY OVER FORGIVENESS

**BLESSED is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.**  
2 **Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity,**  
and in whose spirit *there is no guile.*—Verses 1, 2.

HUMAN biographers usually pass over matters that are not beautiful. They tell of the things that are attractive and honourable, but say little of faults and blemishes. One of the remarkable features of the Bible in writing biographies is that it does not hide good men's faults nor conceal their sins. One reason is that it would warn us against even the best men's mistakes. On the Alps, places where men have fallen are marked for the warning of other tourists who may come that way. So we are told of the sins and falls of men that we may not repeat their mistakes. Another reason is to show us the greatness of the divine mercy that can forgive such sins and then restore the sinner to noble and useful life. Terrible as was David's sin, the story of his fall and restoration has been a blessing to millions.

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." This is a most suggestive beatitude. If we had been writing it,

we would have said, "Blessed is he who never has sinned." But if it read thus it would have no comfort for anyone in this world, for there are no sinless people here. Holy angels might have enjoyed its comfort, but no others could. We may be very thankful that the beatitude runs as it does—"Blessed is the man who has been forgiven." This brings the blessing within the reach of every one of us. It is the first in all the long list of Blesseds, for no blessing can come to any soul until it has been forgiven. The gate of forgiveness is the first gate we must pass through before we can receive any of the other blessings of God's love. Unforgiven sin lies across our path as a mountain which no one can cross over. No other favour or gift or prosperity is of any avail while our sins remain uncanceled. But with forgiveness come all the blessings of life and glory.

The word "covered" seems a strange word to use about anyone's life. There is one way of covering sin which can bring no peace, no benediction. We must not try to cover our own sin, so as to hide it from God. That is what David had been doing with his sins which at last he brought to God, and he tells us a little farther on in the Psalm how little blessing he found in that way. Says the wise man: "He that covereth his transgression shall not prosper. But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Sins which we cover ourselves, even most successfully, as it appears, are not put away. They are

like slumbering fires in the volcano, ready to burst out any moment in all their terribleness. But when God covers our sins they are put away out of sight forever—out of our sight, out of the world's sight, out of God's sight. The Lord says He will remember our sins against us no more forever. So the covering is complete and final when it is God's.

“When I kept silence, my bones wasted away, through my groaning all the day long.” Sometimes we ought to be silent to God. This is the wise thing to do when sore trials are upon us and we do not know what to do. “I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.” There is a great blessing in such silence to God. It brings peace, joy, comfort. It means a submission to God's will in time of suffering. But here is a silence to God which does not bring blessing—silence about our sins. Sins unconfessed cause only bitterness and sorrow. David's language here tells the sad story of the days when he kept silent about his guilt, when he tried to hide it, when he made no confession, was not penitent. It was almost a year. He went on with his work, keeping up the show of royal honour, probably even engaging outwardly in the worship of God. But he could not put away the consciousness of his sins. This memory stayed on his mind and saddened every joy, embittered every sweet, and shadowed the face of God. His very body suffered and his heart kept crying out continually.

It will never do just to keep quiet about our sins and try to hide them and forget them. We should never keep silent to God even a moment about any sin we have committed. We should tell Him at once the evil thing we have done.

“I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” The moment David confessed his sins, back on the very echo of his liturgy of penitence came the blessed assurance of pardon. “I have sinned” —“The Lord hath also put away thy sin.” “I will confess”—“Thou forgavest.” So we learn the only way to get clear of our sins—we must put them out of our heart into the hands of God, by sincere and humble confession, and by true repentance. Then they will trouble us no more forever. Some people try to hide away from God when they have sinned, but this also is a vain effort. Adam and Eve tried this, hiding in the garden after their transgression, when they heard the footsteps of God approaching. But God called them and brought them out before His face to confess their sin. The only safe flight for the sinner from sin and from God is to God. In the divine mercy and beneath the cross of Christ there is secure and eternal refuge.

“Thou art my hiding place.” The Bible, in the Book of Revelation, pictures men, in the day of judgment, calling upon the rocks and the hills to fall upon them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. But the cry is in vain. In their

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despair many men and women resort to suicide, ending their lives in the effort to get away from their sins. Thus they only rush the more quickly and with added sin on their souls into the presence of the Judge they so much dread. But God is a real hiding place from sin. His mercy is an eternal refuge. When He covers sins, they are covered forever. "There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." No pursuer or avenger ever can pass the door of that refuge to drag the forgiven one out. Christ has died for him and he is free forever.

God is also a hiding place, a refuge from trouble. "God had one Son without sin; He has none without sorrow." But there is a hiding place to which sorrowing ones can flee and where they will find comfort that shall give them peace. "In the world ye have tribulation. In me ye may have peace," says the Master. The sorrow may not be shut out, but the divine peace comes into the heart and calms it. God is also a hiding place from danger. In the wildest terrors and alarms we can run to Him, and lying down in His bosom be safe. The danger may burst upon us, but we shall be safe; though we may suffer in our person or in our estate, our inner life shall be unhurt.

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go." Forgiveness is not the whole of Christian life. The forgiven one enters God's school and comes under His instruction. We are to go on increasing in knowledge. We

have God Himself for our teacher. God is always setting lessons for us. Not always are the lessons easy; sometimes they are very hard. God teaches us many of our best songs in the gloom of sick rooms, or in some experience of sorrow. Life is full of lessons. Every day new ones are set for us, and we should be good pupils, ready learners. Then, God also guides us in the way we should go. If we would have His guidance, however, we must be ready to follow, to do all He bids us to do. We must not be like the horse or mule, which have to be compelled by bit and bridle. Our submission should be willing and glad.

“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous.” Joy is a Christian duty. God wants His children all to be happy. Do they never have troubles? Yes, many of them. It is those whom the Lord loves that He chastens. It is the fruitful branches that the husbandman prunes. Still God wants His believing ones to rejoice and be glad. No duty is enjoined in the Scriptures with greater frequency than that of joy. We must learn to rejoice even in pain and sorrow. We must notice, however, what kind of joy it is that we are so earnestly urged to have. It is not the world’s joy—“Be glad in the Lord.” The gladness has its source and fountain in God. It is God’s own gladness, communicated by the Divine Spirit. There is a gladness which is found in sin, which comes from evil-doing—the gladness of the child of God is found in obedience to God and in

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holy living. Those whose gladness depends only on earthly things have no assurance of its continuance, for all earthly things are transitory. Flowers make us glad, but to-morrow they have faded. When it is the love of Christ that gives us gladness our joy is sure, for His joy is everlasting. So we need to give good heed to the grounds of our gladness. To be glad in the Lord comes from putting our trust in Him, in accepting His salvation, His grace, in believing in His love, and then in doing day by day our simple duty, leaving to Him all care, all providing, all protecting, and never allowing a fear or a shadow of anxiety to cross our minds.



## PSALM XXXVI

### UNDER GOD'S WINGS

How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.—Verse 7.

SOME of the most expressive illustrations of the divine love and care employed in the Bible are taken from the ways of birds. For example, this beautiful figure of a bird sheltering her young under her wings runs through all the Scriptures as a picture of God's sheltering love.

We find it often. Boaz welcomed Ruth from her heathen home to the land of Israel, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." In one of the Psalms we find the words, "In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast." In another Psalm is the prayer, "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings, from the wicked that oppress me." In still another Psalm is this word of confidence, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." Then, in the New Testament, our Lord gives the picture yet added beauty and sweeter and more sacred meaning, by His wonder-

ful adaptation of it to Himself. Addressing those who had resisted His love, He said, with a great pain at His heart, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Thus the image is a favourite one in the Bible. Here it is expressed in words of great beauty: "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." While a picture of a bird sheltering her young beneath her wings is before us, let us think of the wings of God and what is beneath them.

They are wings of mercy. The word "loving-kindness" here means mercy-kindness to the undeserving. Under God's wings is a place for penitent sinners. If it were a place only for good people, sinless people, it would have little comfort for us. The angels might go in there, but we could not. But it is a place for sinners.

When you look closely you see that the wings of God are stained with blood. Some birds, when defending their young, put their own bodies between them and the danger, themselves receiving the stroke that was meant to destroy their offspring. Open your Bible and you find that Jesus has been wounded. Up there, amid the bright glory of heaven, He appears as One that has been slain. Look at His hands, those hands that always were so gentle, and there are great wounds upon

them. Look at His feet, those sacred feet that bore Him on so many errands of love, that the penitent woman kissed and wetted with her tears, and there are wound-prints in them. Look at His side, over His heart, that heart which throbbed with so much tenderness and love and compassion; and there you see a spear-wound. You ask how Jesus received these five wounds, and you are pointed to the answer, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: . . . with his stripes we are healed." Then you understand it. Jesus interposed His own blessed body to receive the woundings that would have fallen upon us. That is the meaning of the blood upon the wings of God. The wounds were received in saving us. Beneath these wings is mercy, because love has suffered for us.

The wings of God are wide-spreading. You have seen a hen stretch out her wings to cover her brood; yet hers are not broad wings. They can shelter only her own little family. God's wings are infinitely broader. For six thousand years they have been gathering human souls under their blessed shelter, and yet there is room. In Malachi there is a wonderful word which speaks of the coming Messiah as a Sun, the Sun of Righteousness, whose spreading beams are likened to wings, under which there is healing. Think how widely the sun's radiant beams reach when that orb is in the zenith. God's wings spread over every spot on earth in which is a penitent soul. We know

how the invitations ring out to the weary, the sinful, the lost. The God of the Bible is the God of the sinning and the sorrowing and of those who have failed and fallen. His love is as wide as the race and as free as the sunshine. No sinner has fallen so low but that the wings of God can reach out over him. There is room beneath these wings for all classes—for the happy children, for the strong young people, for the feeble old people.

Sometimes there seems to be no place on earth for the aged. They cannot keep pace any more with the hurrying columns and drop behind. Sometimes even the children, whom they sheltered in infancy, for whom they toiled, suffered, sacrificed, appear to forget to keep a warm nest for their parents in their old age. But there is one place where the old people are never in the way. There is one home from whose door they are never turned away. There is room under the wings of God for the old. God's voice is heard saying: "Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you." How many dear old people has God folded to sleep as gently as ever a mother folded her babe to her bosom!

So there is room for all—the wise man and the ignorant, the strong and the weak, the healthy and the trembling invalid, life's victors and the defeated, the pure and gentle and innocent, and the worst sinners. These wings of God are wide-spreading.

God's wings are gentle. The warmest nests in

this world are those which human love prepares for its dear ones. We know how the mothers tuck their babies away in their little cribs, with pillow of down and soft blankets. We know how warm and gentle a place every true and happy home is for children to rest in and grow up in. We know what tenderness a noble, manly husband prepares for the wife he loves and takes into the shelter of his strength. We know what tenderness many a friendship makes for the life that it enfolds, throwing about it life's fondest gentleness, blessing it with all delicate thoughtfulness and attentive ministry, and sheltering it from life's rude storms and harsh contacts.

We all long for tenderness. To live without it is dreary indeed. It is a blessed thing that it comes to us in so many sweet ways in life. But the love of God is gentler than the fondest human gentleness. Have you ever thought how suggestive of tenderness, warmth, and softness the wings of a bird are? There is something almost human in the way the mother-bird cares for her young. What is softer than the downy feathers she spreads over them?

Some birds build their nests on a rock. Underneath it is bare, cold, and hard. But what do the young birds care so long as over them they feel the warm covering of the mother-bird's feathers? Some of God's children find the earthly nest under them bare and cold. They have to endure the experiences of poverty. Their lot has in it many

hardships. They have trials. At times afflictions are their portion. Not all have human love's tenderness about them. Not every heart's nest in this world is lined with down. There are homes that are not gentle. There are lives with fine feelings and sensibilities which move as amid briars and thorns and are hurt every day. There are many whose relations with others are not of the kind to give comfort. There are children who do not know what the refinements of gentle home-love are. There are hearts that are hurt by ingratitude, by coldness, by rudeness, by incessant unkindness, by unfaithfulness, by betrayal, by wrong and injustice. But the gentleness of God is over all who will nestle beneath it, and it never fails, never lacks in tenderness.

What a warm place this is to which to flee in time of sorrow! Some of us do not yet understand this. We cannot see the stars until the sun goes down and night comes. We cannot know the marvelous tenderness of God while yet we are surrounded and overshadowed and blessed by rich and unbroken human tenderness. There are many things about the love of God which we cannot learn until we lose earth's good things. Again and again persons say in their times of bereavement and sore trial: "I cannot understand the experience I am having. I felt as the sorrow approached that I could not possibly endure it, that my heart would break. But when it came there seemed to be something enfolding me, so that I was not

crushed, but could even sing in my grief and loss." A friend wrote once, when he was watching beside his brother's deathbed, that he was learning not so much the meaning of sorrow as he was learning the meaning of God's comfort. Some of us understand this from our own experience. As we entered the vale of grief and the darkness deepened about us, we felt a Presence we could not see; the darkness seemed to be struck through with a soft, heavenly light. There was something we could not describe which strangely comforted us, keeping us calm and quiet.

We call sorrow a shadow, and we talk about it falling upon us, and deepening, until sometimes all the light of earth is obscured. But it is the shadow of God's wings. What seems darkness is only the darkening of earth's dim lights that heaven's light may shine about us. Sorrow, for a Christian, is not God's withdrawal; it is His nearer coming. We shall never know how warm and soft a place there is beneath the wings of love until we creep there out of earth's nights and blasts of storm.

"He 's better to us than many mothers are,  
And children cannot wander beyond reach  
Of the sweep of His white garment.  
Touch and hold;  
And if you weep, still weep  
Where John was laid  
While Jesus loved him."

In this world we nestle only, as it were, under the outer edge of their broad shadow. We do not, therefore, experience the fullness, the best, the blessedness which lies up nearer the divine heart. Then, what we call dying is, for a Christian, going in deeper beneath these wings. God's grace is very sweet, even on the earth, but heaven is far better.

There is a great comfort for us in this lesson, when we stand by the bedside of our believing friends and watch them pass into the shadow which we call death. It is painful for us to have them go out of our arms into the strange mystery. What place on earth seems so safe and warm for a baby as the mother's bosom? Yet the angel comes and takes it away from this shelter. But we know that when it goes out from this holy warmth, it is carried closer up under God's wings. On the gravestone of a little child they cut the words, "Out of the darkness into the marvelous light." That is the true meaning of dying.

Notice what this Psalm tells us is under these wings of God. There are four things. Satisfaction is the first. "They shall be abundantly satisfied." Joy is the second. "Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures." Life, larger, fuller life, is the third. "With thee is the fountain of life." Light is the fourth. "In thy light shall we see light." These four great blessings



are found beneath the wings of God—satisfaction, joy, life, light.

When we are dwelling beneath the wings of God and under these wings have such marvelous blessings, why should we ever be afraid? Why should we dread to see our Christian friends pass out of this life? When one of the Cary sisters died, the other wrote:

Strange, strange, for thee and me,  
 Sadly afar!  
 Thou safe beyond, above,  
 I 'neath the star:  
 Thou where flowers deathless spring,  
 I where they fade;  
 Thou in God's Paradise,  
 I 'mid time's shade!

Thou in eternal peace,  
 I 'mid earth's strife;  
 Thou where care hath no name,  
 I where 't is life:  
 Thou without need of hope,  
 I where 't is vain;  
 Thou with wings dropping light,  
 I with time's chain.

Yes, here is the shadow: there is the light. To depart and be with Christ is very far better.

God's wings are also wings of refuge. The Revised Version gives the words thus: "The children of men take refuge under the shadow of thy

wings." When the storm comes the mother-bird gathers her young beneath her wings and shelters them, bearing herself the pelting of the hail, but keeping them safe and warm. So Christ gathers His people beneath the wings of His love when the tempest breaks upon them. What tempest? From what do we need a refuge? Does anyone ask the question? Have you never felt the need of a refuge for your own life? Have you never felt yourself driven by fears, by dangers, by alarms, by the wild tempests of sorrow or of doubt, wanting some refuge, some secure place to hide, where you would be safe from the angry strifes? In all such times and experiences there is a refuge beneath the wings of God. There is a refuge there because it is mercy's place. Under the wings of the cherubim was the mercy seat. We have sinned. We need atonement. Those who flee beneath God's wings, beneath the outstretched arms of the cross, have nothing to fear from their sins. They are forgiven. "There is now no condemnation."

But this is not the only sense in which the wings of God give a refuge to men. You know the restful feeling that steals over one when after a day out in the world, amid its strifes, cares, and competitions, its babble of tongues, its insincerities, its disappointments, he enters his own sweet and happy home and shuts his door. Home is a refuge to his heart. He finds love there, sincerity, no enmity, no competition, no sharp dealing. God is home to the human soul that trusts in Him.

“Lord, thou hast been our home from all generations.”

There is a sense in which a noble, true, and faithful human life is a refuge to many others. But the best human refuges are only temporary. You turn some day and find your friend dead. Then when the shock comes, the temptation, the sorrow, the fear, the danger, and you want to fly to him, he is not there, and you are left to fall. Human refuges are well in their place, as revealings of God, as shelters for an hour; but you want to have the Rock of Ages for your refuge. Then you will never find your hiding place removed when you need to flee into it. In any hour you can creep into that shelter and sing:

“Cover my defenceless head  
With the shadow of Thy wing.”

## PSALM XXXVII

### THE DESIRES OF THY HEART

**DELIGHT** thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.—Verse 4.

**THE** young people who have read “The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments” remember the strange story of Aladdin, or The Wonderful Lamp. The son of a poor widow in China became possessed of a magic lamp and ring which commanded the services of certain genii. By rubbing the lamp with the ring Aladdin got whatever he wished and grew rich and great. But that is only an impossible story of magic.

Not in any such way can we get whatsoever we want. Yet in this Psalm we have a promise which seems to tell us of a way in which we can get anything we wish. “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” It is not by rubbing a ring on a lamp, however, that we can get what we desire. Religion is not magic. Yet some people seem almost to think that it is. Simon Magus thought so, and tried to buy the secret. A man who has lived a wicked life, never giving God a thought, when seeming about to die is greatly alarmed, sends for a minister and wants to receive the holy communion, thinking that thus he can have

heaven opened for his soul. It is not in this way that a desire for heavenly blessedness can be gratified.

What is it to delight ourselves in the Lord? It means to love God, to love to be with Him, to love to please Him, to love His ways, His service. We know what it is to delight ourselves in a friend. You love your friend so much that when you are with him you are perfectly happy. You have no wish ungratified; you need nothing else to complete your contentment; your soul finds its home in him. This is the ideal in marriage—that the two who wed shall delight in each other. They should meet each other's desires and yearnings. They should be one in interest, in purpose, in the aims of life. Yesterday I had a letter from the Pacific Coast, from one I have never seen, but whom I have sought to help. She is considering the question of marriage and she writes of the young man: "I love him very dearly and yet I hesitate to give my life into his keeping. He is noble and kind and worthy, but in some respects he is far from being the man I have always had in mind in thinking of marriage. There is something lacking. There is a need in my life which is not met in his—the perfect union in consecration to God." There may be true love there, but there is not yet full, undisturbed delight in the friend. There is not complete accord, there is not perfect confidence, there is not absolute trust. All these elements are essential in delight in a friend.

To delight in God also implies the qualities of love, trust, confidence, accord of will. There is a cluster of counsels in this Psalm which belong together. "Trust in the Lord." "Delight thyself also in the Lord." "Commit thy way unto the Lord." "Rest in the Lord." You cannot delight yourself in God if you do not trust Him. Trust implies confidence. John leaned upon his Master's breast that dark night of the betrayal. The distress of the disciples was terrible. They could not understand. It looked as if all their hopes were in ruin. Yet see John leaning on Jesus' bosom, calm, quiet, unafraid. You remember, too, what Jesus said to His disciples that night, as He comforted them: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." They could not understand, and He could not explain the mystery of their sorrow so that they could understand. Then He asked them to trust in the darkness, just to believe that nothing was going wrong. We must trust God if we would delight in Him. If there is not absolute trust, there cannot be delight. Delight means joy, and if there is the slightest fear, there will be pain, a feeling of insecurity, a dread of something going wrong, or that something will go wrong. Trust in the Lord is necessary to delight in Him.

"I will not doubt, though all my ships at sea  
 Come drifting home, with broken masts and sails;  
 I will believe the Hand which never fails  
 From seeming evil worketh good for me:

And though I weep because those sails are tattered,  
Still will I cry, while my best hopes lie shattered,  
‘I trust in Thee.’”

“Commit thy way unto the Lord.” There will come hours of uncertainty in every life, hours when we shall not know what to do, which way to take, where to find help. Then it is that we should learn that Christ is not only our Saviour from sin, but the Lord also who orders all our ways. There seem to be a great many people who can trust God for the salvation of their souls, but who have not learned to trust Him with the choosing of their ways, the direction of their affairs, the care of their lives. They fret and worry continually. We have not learned the full meaning of trust until we have formed the habit of committing all our way unto the Lord. The reason for worrying, which is so common a habit, even among Christians, is that people do not roll their way upon God. If they only knew this blessed secret they would not worry any more. Only think what it would mean to worrying people if they understood this and instead of being anxious about every little thing, would take it to the Lord in prayer and let the peace of God keep their hearts and their thoughts in holy quiet. Some one writes:

I would not dare, though it were offered me,  
To plan my lot for but a single day,  
So sure I am that all my life would be  
Marked with sad blots in token of my sway.

Instead of trying to manage our own affairs, let us begin to commit them to God. Then there will be no blunders made. We will not any longer spoil the web by ignoring the pattern and weaving our own way. If we learn to commit our way unto the Lord, down to the minutest matters, it will help us to delight in the Lord. It will add immeasurably to our feeling of safety to believe that God is taking care of us. Browning writes:

I lie where I have always lain,  
 God smiles as He has always smiled:  
 Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,  
 Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled.  
 The heavens. God thought on me, His child:  
 Ordained a life for me, arrayed  
 Its circumstances every, one  
 To the minutest.

Another of the words of trust grouped here in this old Psalm is, "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him." One of the marginal renderings is, "Be silent to the Lord." Never answer the Lord in the way of protesting against His guidance, or questioning His providence. Never ask in the day of cross-bearing or pain or trial, "Why?" Some of us are not silent to God when He leads us in ways that are rough and steep. The words mean full and complete submission to the will of God. Silence to God is taught by our Lord Himself. It is woven into the daily prayer He gave us. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is



in heaven." How is God's will done in heaven? Silently, songfully, sweetly. As in heaven, so on earth.

These are suggestions of the meaning of the words, "Delight thyself in the Lord." It means trusting in the Lord. It means committing our way unto Him. It means resting in Him, being silent to Him. It means having our home in God. "Lord, thou hast been our home." The ideal home is a place of perfect love, of perfect accord, of perfect confidence and trust. There is no strife, no doubt, no fear, no bitterness. The ideal home is a place of delight. Men are telling us these days that we should get and keep our lives in tune with God. This means that we fall in line with God in everything. We are not to demand that God shall bring His way down to suit our whims and frailties; rather and always we are to bring all our thoughts, plans, feelings, desires, and ambitions into harmony with His will.

Some one tells of entering a church one Sunday as the congregation were just beginning to sing. At first it seemed as if no two of the hundreds of voices were in accord. But the visitor noticed one clear, sweet, true voice singing, not loud, but calm and undisturbed, amid the discords. As stanza after stanza was sung all the other voices came into accord with this true voice and the last part of the Psalm was sung in perfect accord. This is the way the will of God should rule in our lives. It finds us rebellious,

discordant, out of tune with God, complaining, fretful, discontented, murmuring, even bitter against Him. But as we devote ourselves to God, to follow Jesus Christ, learn of Him, let His Spirit into our life, little by little at first, then more and more, do the discords give way, do the murmurings and rebellings yield to submission, and does the music come into harmony, until our life becomes delight in God's will.

That should be the ideal of every Christian life—perfect accord with God. A good man said, "It takes a long time to learn to be kind." Self lives so persistently in our hearts, we are so full of the old spirit of resentment, unforgiveness, uncharitableness, we are so touchy, so bitter in our prejudices, so prone to see the evil in others and not to see the good, that it does indeed take a long time to learn to be kind. It takes so long that not many persons ever really learn it. There are not many kind people—that is, who are always kind, kind to everyone, to disagreeable people as well as to those who are agreeable, to enemies as well as to friends, to bad as well as to good—and that is what it means in the New Testament sense to be kind. It takes a great while to learn to be kind.

The same is true of every phase of the will of God. It takes a great while to learn to be patient, to learn to trust God, to learn to be absolutely true, to be rejoicing followers of Christ, to be helpers of others. It is a long lesson to delight

oneself in God. Nevertheless, this is the lesson; it will take all your life to learn it well. But to learn it is better than all riches, all power, all fame.

“Delight thyself in the Lord; and he will give thee the desires of thine heart.” So this is the secret we have set out to find. This may seem a rather unusual promise. But the Bible is full of similar promises. The Lord said to Solomon as he began his reign, “Ask what I shall give thee.” Anything Solomon would choose for his life portion, God would give him. A young man says, “I wish God would give me a choice like that.” He does. He says to every young person, “Ask what I shall give thee. Delight thyself in the Lord, and he will give thee the desires of thy heart.”

Remember, first of all, that you are delighting yourself in the Lord. You love Him supremely. You have committed your way to Him. All your desires are holy. One of the things that pleased God in Solomon’s choice was that it was unselfish. He had not asked the life of his enemies. His choice was only that he might be a good king, might be a blessing to his people. If we delight ourselves in God, if He is our soul’s home, if our wills are in full accord with His, we will not have unholy desires, selfish desires. We will desire only the things that God approves. We will not desire the hurt or harm of any human being. Our desires will all be for the honouring of God and the

blessing of others. If we delight ourselves in God we will love to do His will.

Desires turned toward God are prayers. Some people suppose they are praying only when they are on their knees, or in some reverent attitude of devotion. They think they pray only when they speak in words. But many of the most real and most acceptable prayers are never voiced in words. They are only breathings of the soul, longings of the heart, yearnings and aspirations, which cannot be put into language. In one of St. Paul's epistles we are told that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask and think. We can ask much in words, and then what a great field there is where our thoughts can go beyond our words. Thoughts, feelings, and yearnings are prayers if they are turned toward God. Faber has a beautiful stanza about longing:

God loves to be longed for, He loves to be sought;  
 For He sought us Himself with such longing and love,  
 He died for desire of us, marvellous thought!  
 And He yearns for us to be with Him above.

If we truly delight ourselves in God, all our desires will be sent up on faith's wings to God. Any longing of ours which is not fit to be a prayer is not fit to be in our heart at all. Lowell writes of longing:

Of all the myriad moods of mind  
 That through the soul come thronging,  
 Which one was e'er so dear, so kind,  
 So beautiful as longing?

One of our Lord's Beatitudes is for those who long. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Hungers and thirstings after good, desires to be better, longings for more holiness, wishes for closer communion with God and growing likeness to God are prayers, and prayers which God loves to answer. The true spiritual life is full of longings. In the Psalms the writer's soul has intense cravings—not the cries of the unforgiven for forgiveness, but the burning, passionate thirst of the godly for God. We should cultivate spiritual longing. Whether we do or not we get our desires into life and they make us. It is so of good desires.

"The thing we long for, that we are  
For one transcendent moment."

A holy longing makes us holy for the instant. Longing for Christ brings us into Christ's presence for the time. Longing for righteousness makes us righteous. But the same is true of evil desires. If we let sinful wishes occupy our minds we will grow corrupt in heart. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." If you by day and by night cherish wrong desires, impure feelings, unholy imaginations, you will get your desires and your life will rot. That is the secret of much of the world's evil. Let the evil desires stay in your mind and you will soon be in the angels' sight a mass of death. Keep your thoughts clean and

white. Keep your desires fixed upon holy things, right things, on wholesome things and true, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely. Then you will have the desires of your heart—God will give them unto you, and they will build up your life in the beauty of holiness.

“Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” Jesus said, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” This is a thousand times better than any Aladdin’s lamp. Delight yourself in the Lord, abide in Christ, let Christ’s words abide in you, and no desire of yours will be unsatisfied. All life will then be a song. Fullness of good here, then eternal blessedness in heaven.

## PSALM XXXVII

### WAITING FOR GOD

**REST** in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.—Verse 7.

We are told of certain men that they walked with God. If we are walking with anyone we keep close beside him. We do not fall behind him. We do not go faster than he goes. We keep step and walk by his side. We are to walk with God.

The word walk is suggestive. It does not indicate haste. Only once does the Bible show us God running. The father ran to meet the prodigal. He runs to save, to show mercy, to welcome the penitent. But in all His other movements God walks. He is never in a hurry. He walks slowly, and we are told to wait for Him. Unless we want to go alone, we must wait for Him. He will never hurry to please us. We may be sure, too, that we are not going too slowly if He is with us. "Wait for the Lord."

In one marginal reading the words are, "Be silent to the Lord and wait for him." In another it is, "Be still before the Lord and wait for him." His work is not yet finished; you see it now only

in process. An artist is painting a picture. You come into his studio one day and see him at work. You ask him what the picture is and he tells you. You say: "Well, I cannot see any resemblance to my friend in that face. I do not think that drapery is beautiful. That sky is not natural." So you go on chattering and criticizing. The artist says: "Wait till the picture is finished. You cannot see yet what it is to be. Just wait." That is the thought in this Psalm. The writer was in great perplexity. Things seemed to be going wrong. Evildoers appeared to be prospering. They brought their wicked devices to pass. They slandered the righteous. They crushed the innocent and the defenceless. The writer saw all this and it fretted him. "Just be silent to God and wait for Him," was the answer that came to him.

We should wait for God in His providences. It takes time to develop them. We are assured that all things work together for good to them that love God. But oftentimes we find ourselves in experiences which we think cannot possibly bring any good to us. They seem full of hurt. But the answer is, "Be silent to God and wait for Him." This work which seems to our thought so unlike God is not yet finished. When it is complete then the beauty and the good will appear.

We are all quite sure of being in circumstances, sometime in our life, when things will seem to be against us. We may have wasting sickness, bringing suffering, loss of income, heavy expense.



We may have adversity in our business affairs. Death may break in upon our happy circle of love. Our plans may be thwarted. Some day we may sit amid shattered hopes, the broken purposes, and faded flowers of our joys, and say, "There is nothing good in all this." But then will come to us the divine word, "Be silent and wait for God." This seeming confusion is not lawless tangle. The threads are in God's hands, every one of them. But His work is not yet finished.

We must wait for God also in all our work. Sometimes we grow impatient at the slowness with which results come. Parents have their experience as they train their children, in watching for the outcome of their discipline. Teachers meet the same trial of faith in their work with their pupils. When a man works in wood or clay or stone or iron, he sees the result of every stroke. He sees the fragments of the marble fly and the figure of his vision coming out a little more clearly as he hews away. He sees the rough timber grow into smoothness and beauty of form beneath his saw and plane. But work on mind is slow. We cannot take a rude life and make it lovely in a day, as one can dress and carve a piece of wood. We cannot change a fiery, tumultuous, restless spirit to peace, love, and gentleness in one hour, as the sculptor can hew a block of stone into grace. It takes years oftentimes to teach one some moral or spiritual lesson. Many times we do sad hurt to God's work in human lives by our want of

patience. A boy plants his grains of corn in the garden, and at once begins to look for them to grow. The second morning, seeing no points of green pushing up through the soil, he digs the clay away and lays bare the seeds to see what is wrong. In his impatient haste he kills the germs and the seeds never grow at all. He ought to have waited for God.

A writer tells of his experience in hurrying God with the development of an insect. For nearly a year he kept the cocoon of an emperor moth. It was shaped like a flask and in the neck end of it was a little opening. That was where the creature was to crawl out when nature's time—God's time—came. But this opening seemed so small, so much smaller than the insect imprisoned within, that one wonders how it is ever going to get out. Then when it begins to come out of its cocoon, it is with great labour and difficulty that it escapes. This man at last saw the first efforts of the moth to break away from its prison. For a whole forenoon he watched it striving and struggling to get out. It did not appear able to advance beyond a certain point. The opening seemed too narrow. He pitied the poor creature, shut up and unable to escape, and thought he would help it. He supposed he was doing a kindness. He took his scissors and snipped the fine threads to make the opening a little wider. In a moment more, without any further struggle or difficulty, out crawled the moth. But it had a huge, swollen

body and little shrivelled wings. It had not the graceful form it ought to have had. The gentleman watched to see the transformation take place, the dwarfed wings expand into their radiant beauty. But he looked in vain. The moth did not develop at all into loveliness. It never did. He had destroyed it in trying to help it. His kindness had proved the creature's ruin. It was never anything but a stunted abortion, crawling painfully through the brief life which it should have spent flying through the air on rainbow wings. This friend of the little insect was guilty of cruelty instead of being kind. God's slower way was the right way, and he would better have waited for God. If he had, it would have taken longer time and it would not have been so easy for the moth—it would have had to crawl out with great pain and difficulty—but the result would have been a beautiful butterfly, with brilliant wings, flying through the air, and not a poor, misshapen creature crawling about on the ground.

This is a picture of what we do many a time in trying to help God bring souls into the light, or to bring out some spiritual beauty in the life we want to help. We are not too eager to do good—we never can be that; our whole soul should be full of the desire to bless others. But we are in too great haste. We have not patience enough to wait for God. We try to hurry the results we seek. We cannot wait for the seeds to grow. We do not give hearts time to develop their love,

their confidence, their gentleness; we try to hasten these fruits of the Spirit. The result is, that the lives we thus help to premature development are never so beautiful as they would have been if we had waited for God.

We need to learn the lesson also in the living of our own life. We are apt to grow impatient with our own progress. Many a young person in his eagerness to get on in his course and enter active life, mars his work and lessens his own efficiency. It is better to wait for God. Jesus was in no hurry to begin His work. He spent thirty quiet years in preparation, in study, in thought, in simple common duty, waiting patiently for God's time for Him to go forth to His public ministry. Thirty years of preparation and then only three years of work. But we know what kind of work He did in those brief years. Every word He spoke was a word of power. Everything He did left an impression on the ages. Those three years of ministry have been more to the world than a thousand years of the immature, imperfect, fragmentary work many of us do. If with His sinless humanity and His perfect powers, He waited thirty years in preparing for three years of ministry, we need far more than He to be patient and wait for God before we go out to speak and work for Him. If we put more time into preparation, the fewer years left us for work would count for far more in the end than do now our many years filled with immaturity, with work that counts for little, with

words without wisdom and without weight. Let us wait for the Lord that our work, when the time comes for work, may have power and good in it.

We need to wait for God, also, in finding our way in this world. Duty is not always plain for us at once. We come continually to points where we cannot tell which way we ought to go. If we are God's children and are faithfully following Christ, we shall never have to take one step in the dark. Jesus said, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness." This means that duty will always be made clear. We shall never have to stumble along in uncertainty. We shall be able to make the right decisions and the right choices. But we must always wait for God. If we insist on running on before Him, of course we shall be in the dark. It is just as dark in advance of God's glorious leading as it is away behind Him. If we would know the way and see what our duty is, we must wait for the Lord.

For example, if you come to a wise friend with a question about what you should do next year, or next autumn, or even next week, it is probable that all the friend can say will be, "Wait." You are not sure of having any next year, or next autumn, or next week. The question of duty may be the one that must wait until the time comes. You are sorely perplexed about what you ought to do in some matter that touches your life in a very close and sacred way. Yet the answering of it is beset with difficulties. You can-

not tell what you ought to do or say. On neither hand is the way open and plain. The word of God to you is, "Wait for the Lord." But it seems to you the answer must be given now, at once. The question stands clamourous at your door and wants immediate decision. But no clamourousness of any question, no pressure of friends for your decision, no impatience of your own heart for action should be allowed to compel you to decide upon your course in the dark, or until the way is clear and the duty plain. God never requires us to walk in darkness, even for one single step. Therefore, inexorably refuse to answer any question or decide any matter until you know what you are doing. Guess work and stumbling are never necessary. Wait for God. You are trying to go faster than He is moving. Wait till He comes up, and then the way will no longer lie in darkness.

There is a bit of Scripture which says that God will order our steps. Mark, it is our steps that He orders. He does not give us a map of the world with all our paths traced out upon it, so that we can see our whole course for years. He orders our steps. And that means that He will always show us one step—but it is the next step that He shows, not one a mile ahead. And this next step will always lie in the light, although the second step may yet be hidden in the darkness, and must be waited for. But the one step is the only one you need to take this moment.

You may think that you must answer some question or decide some matter immediately, even though it is all dark to you, and your answer or decision must be only a guess. Nay, wait for God. When He comes up you will be able to answer or decide clearly. If you compel yourself to make a decision in the dark, in uncertainty, it is not God's leading. You have decided too soon. To-morrow or a few days or weeks hence it may appear to you to have been a wrong decision, but then it will be too late to change it. Wait for the Lord.

Another application of this lesson is with reference to suffering wrongs at the hands of others. Naturally we all like to take care of our own rights. We start up quickly in self-defence when we are assailed, when anyone speaks against us or harms us in any way. But this is not the Christian way. The gospel of Christ leaves very small room for self-defence. "Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . Pray for them which . . . persecute you." "Avenge not yourselves." So runs the law of Christian life. What shall we do, then, when others defame us, or say false things of us, or seek to harm us? Two things: our simple duty, and then, wait for the Lord. Vindication is better left with Him. That is what this same Psalm teaches in verses 5 and 6: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall

bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." We may safely leave our name, our reputation, our character, in God's hands, when we are innocent of the things men charge against us. If we quietly go on with our work and our duty, God will take care that in the end vindication shall come. It is better usually that we should not meddle with the matter at all. Our impatience, our hurry to help God vindicate us, oftentimes only does harm. Be silent and wait for the Lord. We cannot go on without God; to do so is to walk in darkness. But if we would have God with us, we must wait for Him. We must wait for Him to work out His providences until His purpose has been accomplished, meanwhile trusting Him and resting in His love. We must wait for Him to come to our relief when we are in circumstances of trial and perplexity. We must wait for Him to answer our prayers, not losing heart because He sometimes delays. We must wait for Him in our work for others, in trying to help them, lest in our eagerness we hasten the processes of His will and stunt or mar or destroy that which with patience would have been beautiful. We must wait for God in every step of our life.

Peace comes in waiting for God. It is our restlessness that makes life so painful for many of us. "Does your limb hurt you severely?" asked one of a friend who lay with a broken leg. "Not when I keep still," was the answer. If we would



keep still when trial is upon us, and be silent to God, we would have power.

It is a lesson of hope, too, as well as of faith. The things that perplex and try us are God's unfinished works. When they are finished there will be no confusion, no seeming evil, no hurt in them. Bear the pain now, for pain is God's way to health. Accept the cross now, for the cross is God's way to the crown. Endure the plowshare that drives now through your field, for it is God's way to a golden harvest. Be patient with the slowness of Providence, for God works for eternal years. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. The finished work by and by will explain all that is now dark and hard and slow.

## PSALM XLII

### THE LIVING GOD

MY soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?—Verse 2.

THESE were many gods among the ancient heathen. Every nation had its deities. It used to be said in Athens that it was easier there to find a god than a man. The statues and shrines of these deities were everywhere. But these were not living gods. They breathed not, thought not, loved not. In another of the Psalms we have this picture: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat." Such gods could give no help to those who trusted in them. They could hear no cries of distress. They could answer no prayers. They could not deliver from danger. They could give no comfort to those who were in sorrow. They could meet no cravings of hungry hearts for love, for sympathy, for life, for peace. But the God of the Bible is the

living God. Then he is our Father. There are those who tell us that there is a great central force at the heart of the universe by which all things are held in their place. They call it a force—a mighty, mysterious force. But they give it no attributes which make that force dear to human hearts in their need and sorrow. It cannot hear prayer. It cannot love. It cannot trouble itself with our daily trials and cares. You could not pillow an aching head on it and find soothing.

But the God of the Bible has more in His nature than power—is more than omnipotence. We read but a little way in the Book till we find that He has a heart of tenderness and love like our mothers. He is revealed in the Old Testament as a God who thinks of His creatures and cares for them. He came and walked in the Garden of Eden with our first parents, sought their companionship, craved their confidence and affection, and was grieved by their sin. He was interested in the life and work of men, was willing to lead them, to help them. He cared for those who would obey Him and trust Him, defended them, provided for them, blessed them. He was revealed also as a God of mercy, forgiving sin.

But it is in the New Testament that the revelation is made in its fullness. Jesus Christ was a teacher come from God, and He uses only one name in telling us of God—the name Father. He told men that the God who made all the worlds and dwelt in glory was their own Father, and then

He put into that holy word all that is sacred, tender, sweet, compassionate—all that love could possibly mean. It is when we see something of God's love for us, when we begin to understand that He is our Father, caring for us with all a father's tenderness and affection, that we realize the meaning of the name—the living God. He is the God of power, the God who made all things and keeps all in being, but He is the God of love as well. He has a heart of sympathy and tenderness. He pities us in our sorrow and need, and is quick to help.

This truth of the living God is full of rich encouragement. It assures us of satisfying for all our heart's deep cravings. "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." No idol could ever satisfy a soul's longings; nothing but a personal God can do this. We are made for God, and we never can find rest until we find it in Him. Jesus Christ stands and calls to all this world of weary ones, saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."

We know what a satisfying of the heart even strong and deep human friendship gives. There are human friends who are to us like a great rock in a weary land. We flee to them in the heat of parching days and rest in their shadow. A friend in whom we can confide without fear of disap-

pointment, who we know will never fail us, who will never stint his love in serving us, who always has healing tenderness for the hurts of our heart, comfort for our sorrows, and cheer for our discouragements—such a friend is not only a rock for shelter, but is also rivers of water in a thirsty land. Yet this at its best is only a hint of what Christ is to those who bring their thirsts to Him. His love meets the deepest yearnings of our souls for love. His wisdom answers all the questions of human restlessness. His life fills up the emptiness of our lives. When a soul thirsts for the living God, its longings will surely be satisfied. Things will not satisfy. Even the best of God's blessings will not do it. Nothing less than God Himself will do it.

This truth of the living God gives us confidence in prayer. Is there anyone to hear us when we cry out of a sense of need or danger or desire? Is there anyone who cares to help us or bless us? If there is not, there is no use in praying. If God is only a great central Force at the heart of things—like the sun, like gravitation—it is in vain that we bow down, morning and night, and tell out our heart's yearnings. Would a man pray to the wind, or to the sun, or to the attraction of gravitation? If there is no living God, there can be no prayer, for then there is no heart to feel, no ear to hear, no hand to help. One of the saddest things in this world is to see men and women praying to idols, bowing before empty

shrines, worshiping relics of saints—things that have no life and no power to do anything.

But our God is the living God. He made the heavens and has universal power. He is also our Father. "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." It was Jesus Himself who taught us to come to God with the words "Our Father" on our lips. We know that there is One who hears our cries, and is interested and sympathetic, and pleased to grant us answers of peace and love. Our God is the living God.

What would we do if there were no one to whom we could pray? What would we do if there were no heavenly Father, no living God in the universe, no one who cared for us and could help us? Suppose you were to learn that all this cherished belief in your heart was a mistake, that there really is no one anywhere to hear you when you pray, no one who cares for you, or thinks upon you, or can give you any help—how dark the world would become to you! Those who have been reared in the simple faiths of Christianity, believing in a God of love, in the cross of Christ, and in prayer, and then have lost their sweet faiths, have confessed that in the fading out of these Christian beliefs in their hearts they lost their brightest joys and their dearest happiness. So would it be if you were to learn in some way that your childhood belief in prayer was a mistake, a delusion, and that no one really hears your cries or cares for you. The brightness would die out of the

world for you. No other loss, no bereavement, no misfortune that you might possibly suffer, could compare for a moment with the loss of your faith in God as your Father and as the Hearer of your prayers. What would you then do when you had sinned and when the sense of guilt sweeps over you like a flood of dark waters, if there were no God of mercy to forgive? What would you do in the time of overmastering temptation, of great danger, of heavy loss, or of deep sorrow, if there was no one in heaven who loved you and would hear your call for help? What would you do in the hour of dying, when every human hand must unclasp yours, when every human face fades from your vision, and you must enter the strange mystery alone—what would you do then, if there were no living God to walk with you?

But we need not vex ourselves with such suppositions. We need fear no such sweeping away of our childhood faiths. Our belief in prayer is no illusion. Our God is indeed the living God, who loves us, knows our needs, thinks upon us, hears our feeblest prayer. The God at the center of all power is our Father.

Again, this truth of the living God gives us assurance of divine thought and care in all our life. Suppose, again, you were to learn that there is no one with wisdom, power, and love interested in the affairs of this world—that all things come by chance, that no wisdom directs, that no hand guides and controls events, that the world is only

a vast machine, grinding on forever, that bad men and devils have no check in their power to hurt, and that all men and all lives are victims of this mighty, heartless, remorseless grinding; how it would darken all life for you! No God of love directing! No Father thinking of His children and keeping them in the midst of disasters! No Providence watching over the lives of men in all the mighty rush of events, and overruling all things for their good!

Dark indeed would the world grow to our hearts if such atheistic supposition were to be proved true. A world without a Father! A universe without love! But this is not the teaching of the Bible. There we learn that this is our Father's world, one of the many mansions of our Father's house. We do not have to wait for heaven to find ourselves in God's care; we are in His care, sheltered in His love, quite as really in this world, with all its storm and peril, as we shall be when we reach heaven. There is not one trusting child of God on the earth to-day who is not watched over by the heavenly Father as tenderly as any infant is nourished and sheltered in a mother's arms. The Lord is thy keeper. He that keepeth thee shall not slumber.

God rules in all the events and providences of this world. Things do not run riot, like wild, restless steeds, treading all frail, gentle things under their iron hoofs. This is not a world of chance. There is no lawlessness anywhere. No



wave of the sea in wildest storm is out of God's control. No pestilence, no earthquake, no flood of trouble, no tidal wave of misfortune, ever gets beyond the power of Him who sitteth on the throne. In a great freshet in the West, when the river swept far out of its banks, and houses and crops and timbers were carried away on its bosom, some men in a skiff saw a baby's cradle among the drift. Rowing to it, they found a baby sleeping sweetly in its soft, warm blankets, unhurt, unawakened in the midst of the wild waste of rushing waters. So does God keep His little ones, safe and unharmed, in the midst of this world's dangers and alarms.

It does not always seem so, even to Christian faith. Sometimes God's children appear to be sorely hurt in life's experiences. Prayers for relief seem not to be answered. There seems to be no divine hand directing, holding evil in check, overturning men's wicked schemes, keeping God's child in safety, guarding and nourishing the good, the true, the holy. When we look only at the sorrow, the loss, the suffering, the apparent triumph of wrong, the pain, hardship, cruelty, and grief we see everywhere, we sometimes almost question the truth of the teaching that God rules in all this world's affairs and ever keeps His own. But we must take wider views of the Divine Providence. Earthly evil is not the sorest evil. Sorrow, sickness, pain, loss, and personal suffering or injury are not the things that really hurt our

lives. It is possible to suffer every manner of trial and ill, and yet to be continually receiving blessing. God's keeping of us from evil does not necessarily mean His keeping us from pain and trial. Jesus Himself was kept in the divinest keeping, and yet all the world's bitterness swept over Him. St. Paul's life was one of suffering and loss to the very end, and yet his real life, which he had entrusted as a holy deposit to Christ, was kept untouched by harm, uninjured, untarnished, through all the experiences of enmity and suffering through which he passed.

So it ever is to those who commit their souls to Christ and abide in Him. Temptations come, and there may be persecutions, disasters, misfortunes, crushing adversities, torturing sorrows. But if the life be truly hid with Christ in God, no harm can touch it. Property may be taken away, friends may forsake, pain may rack, the body may be mangled; but none of these calamities can touch the soul. It is in the keeping of the living God, who is faithful, and in whose hands we can never be harmed. On ships at sea, at night, when the bell strikes the hours, the watch on the lookout calls, "All's well!" It may be a night of terror. The storm beats on the waters. The waves break over the decks. The passengers are in dread. Many are trembling and afraid. There is great distress on board. Yet hour after hour, as the night passes, and the bells ring, the cheerful words sing down from the little nest on the

mast, where the lookout keeps his watch, "All 's well!" "Ten o'clock, and all 's well!" "Eleven o'clock, and all 's well!"

All is well indeed, in spite of the storm, the waves, and the sickness and terror of those on board. The great ship is riding in safety through the tempest. It is conquering wind and waves. It is bearing its precious cargo of human lives steadily toward the haven, in spite of adverse storms and tossing seas. "Twelve o'clock, and all's well!" So the hours move, and morning comes at last, the sun shines forth, the waves sob themselves into a calm, and there is joy once more among the passengers.

So it is that the voice of Christian hope ever sings its song of cheer in men's ears in the midst of this world's storms. "All 's well!" Yet it is a sad world, full of grief and tears. The words seem to mock us as we sit in our darkness, with the waves sweeping over us and the tempest breaking upon our soul. How can all be well while all things appear to be so against us?

In the world at large God's plan of wisdom and love goes on amid all human sin and failure. Good will come at last out of all that seems evil. The morning will break, the sun will shine, and the great ship will be found out of the storm, sailing on, with canvas untorn, with engines throbbing, triumphant over every danger. Let us never doubt that the destiny of the world is good, not evil; life, not death. God lives, God reigns, and

He will bring this earth through all its darkness into light. Christ is the Pilot. He is keeping watch. It is His voice that we hear calling down as the hours pass, "Midnight, and all 's well!" "Morning watch, and all 's well!" Redemption will conquer. The good ship will master the storms and come safely to the haven. The voice of the Master is heard, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

There is only one way we can suffer harm in the world. If we lose faith we will be hurt—not by the trial, but by the disbelief. Keep your faith strong. Lie like a little child in the hands of Christ. Let not your heart be troubled—only believe. Then He will keep you, not only in perfect peace, but also in perfect security. Midnight, and all 's well! Our God is the living God, our Father, our Redeemer.

## PSALM LI

### DAVID'S CONFESSION

**HAVE** mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.—Verses 1, 2.

**THERE** is no reason to change the old-time belief that the fifty-first Psalm belongs with the story of David's great sin. It tells of his penitence after his sin had been shown to him by Nathan. We see in it the path by which he returned to God. Since David wrote the words of this Psalm thousands have used them, and they have become the liturgy of penitence for all who seek divine mercy.

Notice David's thoughts of God as we find them in his confession. He saw Him as a God of loving-kindness. In all the poignant sense of guilt that pressed upon his soul, there was not a shadow of despair. The moment he saw his sin there poured upon him also a glorious disclosure of God's love. He confessed, "I have sinned," and at once Nathan said, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." From this revealing of the divine mercy hope came at once. Had David not seen God in

this light when the sense of his sin overwhelmed him, utter, hopeless darkness would have come upon him, and he would have been lost in the gloom. Thus it was with Judas after he had betrayed his Lord, when the terrible tide of conviction swept over his soul. He saw no ray of hope, and in his dark despair he went out and hanged himself. On the other hand, when Peter had denied his Master, and when, beneath the grieved look of that holy Eye, a sense of sin overwhelmed him, he went out and wept bitterly. But through his tears he saw God as a God of mercy and love, and instead of despair hope sprang up in his soul, and he was restored, living to be a glorious apostle. It is most important that the convicted sinner shall see God as a God of mercy and love, as David saw Him, as Peter saw Him.

Notice also David's thoughts of his sin. First, he thought about his sin as his own. "My transgressions," "mine iniquity," "my sin," "I have sinned," are the words he uses. He does not try to lay the blame of his wrongdoing on some other one, as our first parents did. He does not plead the peculiar strength of his temptation and try to excuse himself for sinning so grievously. He does not talk of his peculiar environment or circumstances. He does not try in any way to apologize for his fall or to mitigate in any measure the degree of his guilt. He frankly takes the whole responsibility on himself. This shows the sincerity of his repentance.

An old writer said that nothing else in the world is so much our own as our sins. We cannot push the responsibility off on any tempter or on any circumstances. Others may tempt us, but no one can compel us to sin. There is no sin in being tempted—sin begins when we yield to the temptation. Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are, but it was without sin. We are commanded to resist the Devil, and we are told that he will flee from us. Others may tempt us and the guilt of the tempter is great. But no one can compel us to sin. Until we lift the latch sin cannot enter our heart's door. We are responsible, therefore, for our sins, and must bear the burden of them ourselves.

We must also personally seek and find forgiveness for our own sins. No intercessor can obtain pardon for us unless we are penitent ourselves. Christ's expiation for us is accepted, but even Christ's intercession will not bring forgiveness if we do not personally repent and seek mercy. No one can obtain forgiveness for us for any unconfessed sin of ours.

Another of David's thoughts about his sin was that it was against God alone. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." The smallest wrong thing we do is done against God. If we speak a rude or impatient word to a beggar, it strikes God's heart, and the sin is against Him. If we are unkind to a dumb beast, we sin against God. Our unholy thoughts, which we think harm no one,

grieve God. Every sin is a personal offence to Him. We may injure others and do wrong and injustice to them, but the sin is really and always against God. It is the law of God that we break, no matter what evil thing we do, and in breaking His law we have struck God in the face. We stand in such relations to God all the while that every act, word, or thought of ours affects Him personally, either pleasing Him and meeting His approval, or grieving Him and receiving His condemnation.

Another thought of his sin which David had was that it was inborn. He was not born holy. Sin is not altogether a habit which one acquires through years of living. It is not a result of bad education. It is not a little soiling of one's nature from the outside by contact with an evil world. Sin is in the heart, and was born with us.

Notice also David's thought of the mercy he needed. First, there is a simple cry for mercy. "Have mercy upon me, O God." This was his greatest need. He did not begin his prayer by asking for favours, for prosperous circumstances, for many friends. Before any blessings could count in his life he must get clear of his sin, and must have God's mercy. The words represent his transgressions as all written down against him in the book of accounts, and he pleads to have them blotted out, erased, rubbed from the page. There is something very startling in this thought that our sins are charged against us, and that



unless we get the record expunged we shall have to meet the penalty. But the blessed truth here is that sins may be blotted out, no matter how many or how great they are.

Sin is represented as leaving a stain, and the prayer is that it may be washed off. That is, sin not only writes its record against us on God's book, but it also defiles and pollutes our lives. We need not only to have the guilt removed—to be justified, but we need also to have our lives cleansed—sanctified. The word “thoroughly” means a cleansing which reaches the very center of the being. The stains are deep, and the purifying process must go on until they are all removed. The ancient method of washing clothes was by beating or treading, and David asks God even to tread him down if necessary to remove the foul spots. We should pray God to wash us until every stain is taken away, however painful the process must be. “Cleanse me from my sin.” It is the language used of cleansing lepers. The word “wash” refers to garments and surface stains, and the word “cleanse” refers to sin as a disease, a leprosy in the soul. This prayer, therefore, is for the cleansing of the very nature. There is still another expression in the prayer: “Purge me with hyssop.” In certain ancient ceremonies the blood was sprinkled with a hyssop branch. We may not be able to read into this prayer all the New Testament teaching about Christ's sacrifice, and yet the idea is certainly

present, and for us means cleansing by Christ's blood.

Notice, then, David's thought about the renewal which comes with God's forgiveness. It is inward renewal. When the love of God streamed into his soul he saw how much he needed to have done in him to make him what God would have him to be. First, he had a new conception of the divine requirement. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." Truth is genuineness, sincerity, righteousness. God despises hypocrisy. No mere external reformation will avail while the heart remains wrong. With this lofty conception of the divine ideal of character, there is a beautiful evangelical teaching in David's prayer for renewal. He pleads for the application of the blood of atonement to his life, then for the assurance of forgiveness, that the lost joy might be brought back. Next he prays for renewal of heart: "Create in me a clean heart." He has discovered the black fountain of sin in his life, pouring up its defiling waters and polluting all his soul. He cannot himself stanch this black well, and he brings it to God that He may purify it. The word "create" shows that David understood the necessity of a divine work in him, a work nothing less than a new creation. In this prayer for renewal he pleads also that the Holy Spirit may abide with him, be with him. He remembered Saul's terrible fate, when God took His Holy Spirit from him, and pleaded that the same calamity

might not fall upon him. "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me." While he prayed for the continuance of God's Spirit upon him, he prayed also that his own spirit might be constant, steadfast, and free—that is, willing. In other words, he desires the spirit of entire consecration to God's will and service. Then he asks for the restoration of the joy of salvation.

Notice once more in this Psalm David's thought about serving God. When he had been forgiven and the joy of salvation had been restored to his heart, he would begin to be a blessing to his neighbours and friends. We cannot bring others to Christ when we have no joy of forgiveness in our own hearts. But the moment we are forgiven and the joy begins in us, we begin to desire to help others, to teach transgressors God's ways, and to lead sinners back home.

Other suggestions are found in the words which follow. The tongue of a forgiven man will sing aloud of God's righteousness. His opened lips will speak forth God's praise. The character of the service which God desires from us is sketched in the closing words—not sacrifice of animals or any possessions. The sacrifice that pleases God is a penitent spirit and contrite heart.

## PSALM LV

### BLESSING FROM LIFE'S CHANGES

**GOD shall hear, and afflict them, even he that abideth of old. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.—Verse 19.**

SOME changes are grateful, adding to life's pleasure. In travel, the ever-changing scene, with surprises at every turn, new vistas from every hilltop, give unspeakable delight. What a dreary world this would be if it were only an interminable plain, with no variety of hill and vale, mountain and meadow, forest and field, river and lake! The change rests us. So with life itself. No two days are alike. Each brings its newness, its untried experiences, its hopes, its visions of promise. Change is the charm of life. Monotony is wearisome. Routine irks us. There is health in variety. Still water stagnates; the moving stream keeps sweet and wholesome.

But there are changes which we dread. They break into our plans and hopes. The things we cling to to-day slip out of our hands and leave them empty to-morrow. Nothing human or earthly is enduring. Circumstances are fickle. We abide not in one stay.

There are some homes and some lives which appear for a long time to have scarcely a break. They have uninterrupted prosperity. They are not disturbed by sickness. They have no bereavements to break the circle of love. They seem exempt from the law of change. But this is rare. Usually sorrow and joy alternate. There are breaks in the prosperity. Life is not all gladness—sometimes tears choke the music. How pathetic are some homes, with their vacant chairs, their memorials of sorrows, their emptiness and loneliness, where erst a happy household lived, joyed, sang, and prayed together!

We dread changes. We like to stay in one place. We shrink from dislodgements and unsettlements. We adjust ourselves to conditions and it hurts us to be disturbed. We are like trees—we take root in the soil and when we are torn out, a thousand tendrils of our hearts are left bleeding. We get used to the friends with whose lives our life has become knit, and separation rends away part of our very being. We would like to keep things always as they are. We learn so to depend on the people and the things that make up our wonted environment, that it seems to us life will be scarcely worth while if this happy environment be broken up. So it comes that we learn to rate life largely by its changes or no changes. But this Psalm-verse reads it all differently. It does not say that changes are marks of misfortune. Rather, it intimates that

there is peril in no changes. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God."

"No changes" means unbroken prosperity—no troubles, no losses or sorrows, no adversities; year after year with no break in the happiness. You would not naturally consider such an experience one of calamity. The circumstances of the family have grown more and more easy. They have added to their comforts until they live luxuriously. There have been no long illnesses, causing pain and anxiety, and draining the resources of the household. There have been no deaths, breaking the happy home circle.

No one thinks of pitying such a family. We do not make special prayers for it. If a man has been in some affliction, or has met with some great loss, it is fitting to ask prayers of the church for him: but for a man growing rich, in great prosperity, why should we ask prayers? Yet this is the man who really needs most to be prayed for. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God."

"When brims thy cup with sparkling joy,  
When happy tasks the hours employ,  
When men with praise and sweet acclaim  
Upon the highways speak thy name,  
Then, soul, I bid thee have a care—  
Seek oft thy Lord in fervent prayer."

There are several ways in which the absence of changes may work hurt to the spiritual life.

Unbroken prosperity is apt to hinder our growth in spiritual experience. No doubt there are truths which cannot be learned so well at least in light as in darkness. We should never see the stars if there were no night to blot out for the time the glare of day. If there were no changes of seasons—if it were summer all the year, think what we should lose of the beauty of autumn, the splendour of winter, the glory of bursting life in springtime. If there were no clouds and storms, we should never see the rainbow, and the fields and gardens would miss the blessing of the rain. Thus even in nature there are revealings which could never be made if there were “no changes.”

The same is true in spiritual life. We do not learn the most precious truths of the Bible in the bright glare of unbroken prosperity and human joy. Many of the divine promises are like stars which remain invisible in the noonday of gladness, hiding away in the light, and reveal themselves to us only when it grows dark round us. Older Christians will testify that the sweeter meanings of many portions of the Scriptures have come to them amid the changes of life. We do not really understand God's comfort until some sorrow comes. To miss the sorrow is to miss also the beatitude of comfort.

The same is true of growth. There are developments of spiritual life which can come only through trial. The photographer takes his sensi-

tized plate with your picture on it into a darkened room, away from the sunlight, to develop it. He could not bring out the features in the brightness. There are many of us in whom God could not bring out His own image if it were always light about us.

You know how certain song birds learn to sing new songs. They are shut away for a time in a dark room and the new melody is sung or played over and over where they can hear it. At length they catch it and when they come out they sing it in the light. Many of the songs of peace and joy and hope which we hear in Christian homes were learned in the darkness. Much of the spiritual beauty which illumines some radiant faces is the work of pain and sorrow.

The artist was trying to improve on a dead mother's picture. He wanted to take out the lines. But the son said, "No, no; don't take out the lines; just leave them every one. It wouldn't be my mother if all the lines were gone." Then he went on to speak of the burdens the sainted mother had borne and the sorrows which had plowed deep furrows in her life. She had nursed babies and had buried them. She had watched over her children in sickness. Once when diphtheria was in her home and no neighbour would venture near, she cared for her sick ones night and day till they were well. Her life all its years had been one of toil and care and sacrifice. The son did not want a picture with the story of all



this taken out of the face. Its very beauty was in the lines and furrows and other marks which told of what her brave heart had suffered and her strong hands had done for love's sake. No woman of easy and luxurious life, with "no changes," could have had that holy beauty.

St. Paul speaks of bearing in his body the marks of Jesus. He referred to the scars of the wounds of his scourgings and stonings, and the other traces left by his manifold sufferings for Christ. They were marks of honour and beauty in heaven's sight, like the soldier's wounds got in the battles of his country. An easy, self-indulgent life gets no such marks of glory. It is the life of lowly service, of self-denial, of sacrifice, that wins the lofty heights of spiritual experience. To have no change is to miss all this.

Again, a life with "no changes" is in danger of becoming ungrateful. When there is no break in the stream of goodness for a long while, we are likely to lose out of our heart the thought of God as the author of all. Luther somewhere says, "If in His gifts and benefits God were more sparing and close-handed, we should learn to be more grateful." The same is true in our common human relations. Children who live in a home of luxury and never have a wish denied them, are in danger of losing gratitude toward the parents who are the almoners of God's Providence for them. Perhaps children who receive less, because their parents are unable to give them more, who oft-

times must do without things they want, and who see what it costs their parents to provide for them, are usually more grateful than those who have everything they wish.

Breaks in the flow of divine favour recall us to gratitude. We never appreciate the blessing of health at its full value until, for a time, we are sick, and are called aside from active duty. It is only thus that we learn to be truly and worthily grateful for the boon of health. We are apt to fail to recognize the rich blessings of our home until there comes a break in the circle of loved ones. Those with whom we walk every day in close, familiar relations, and upon whom we depend for much of our happiness, are apt to grow commonplace to our thought. They are plain and old-fashioned to us. We see them at such close view that much of their beauty of soul is lost in the little faults and imperfections which our eyes do not fail to see. We have always been so used to their love and its ministries and kindnesses, that we do not realize its richness, its tenderness, its thoughtfulness, its self-denials. Ofttimes we are ungrateful for our home, even complain about its lack, and fret over our little trials, not appreciating what we have in our home, until a sad change comes. One of the plain, commonplace loved ones, who has been so much to us, although we knew it not, quietly departs. Then in the loss we first learn the value of the life that is gone. The vacant place is the first true

revealer of the worth which never before was understood or appreciated. The most grateful households are not always the unbroken ones. The praise that rises to God for home and its blessings is often sweeter and richer at the family worship where the voices tremble in the hymns, and where tears sometimes choke the prayers, than where no memories of loss or sorrow mingle in the praise.

When we have "no changes" we are in danger of forgetting our dependence upon God. When year after year the rains come in their season, the fields yield rich harvests, the barns are full, and the tables are well covered with provisions, men are apt to forget that they are dependent upon God for fruitful seasons and golden harvests and daily bread. When business prosperity is unbroken through long periods, when there are no reverses, no failure of plans, no misfortunes; when everything they touch turns to gold, and when they have no losses, then men are apt to forget that God has anything to do with their success and cease to look to Him for it. When for a long time we have had no break in our prosperity, we are in danger of settling down into a feeling of security, which is by no means a good spiritual state.

It is needful for most of us, at least, to be baffled oftentimes, defeated, just to keep us dependent on God. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." Whatever helps

us to grow into complete subjection to the divine will and entire dependence upon God, is a blessing, how great soever its cost may be. It is a sore misfortune to any of us, if we are left without changes till we grow proud, self-conceited, and self-willed, and ask no more to know what God's will for us is. It is a sore misfortune if one has had his own way so long that he has come to regard himself secure in his prosperity, intrenched in his place, impregnable in his power, and to think that he never can be moved, never can have any adversity or failure, that his position is sure and safe forever.

There is in Deuteronomy a picture of the eagle and the young eaglets in the nest. The nest is cosy and warm, and the young birds do not care to leave it, to try their wings. Then the mother eagle stirs up the nest, making it rough, so that her young will not love it so much. Thus she compels them to try to fly away. For eagles are not made to live in soft nests, but to soar skyward. Thus God, too, when our place has grown too soft and satisfying, stirs up our nest with life's changes, that He may train us to fly heavenward. We think it very strange when Christ enters our sweet, happy home in a way that seems stern and ungentle for a Christ of love, breaking its joy. But afterwards we care more for heaven, and your heart, disenchanted with earth, reaches up and lays hold anew upon God. We are made, not for any soft nest of earthly content, but for

glory and for God. Blessed are the changes that make heaven mean more to us!

Freshly let us learn the changefulness and the transitoriness of earth and all earthly things. Nothing here is abiding. Only God is changeless. Only Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea, and forever. The sweetest home will be broken up. The strongest, truest love will unclasp. The richest earthly joy will end. Only God is eternal.

There is a legend of Abraham, which says that when he was seeking for the true God, he saw a brilliant star gleaming in night's canopy, and bowing before it, he said, "Thou art my Lord, O star!" But as he watched, the star's brightness vanished in its setting, and he sadly said, "No setting star be Lord for me." The harvest moon then appeared, and he said, "Be thou my Lord." But all too soon the silver moon sank out of sight. Forth came the sun, with morning glory. "O sun, thou art my Lord," he said. But soon that glorious orb, too, whirled to its setting, and darkness came. Then was the patriarch led to the glorious truth that Jehovah only is God, worthy of all worship, love, trust, and praise. Bowing, he said:

"My Lord shall be that glorious One  
Who made the stars, the moon, the sun:  
To Him I flee,  
And He shall be  
My refuge till life's course is run."

## PSALM LVII

### AWAKE UP, MY GLORY

My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. 8 Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I *myself* will awake early.—Verses 7, 8.

THE fifty-seventh Psalm is attributed to David. The time to which it is set down in the title is, “when he fled from Saul in the cave.” The writer cries to God for refuge. His soul is among lions. His enemies have prepared a net for his steps. Then he cries as if to arouse himself to joy. “Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp.” The verses of the Psalm which follow give us the music which flows forth from the awakened strings. “I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people. . . . For thy mercy is great unto the heavens.”

Many of us need at times to make this same call upon ourselves to awake. The harps are hanging silent on the walls. The figure of instruments of music sleeping is very suggestive. They are capable of giving forth rich melodies, but not a note is heard from them. There are two thoughts suggested by this prayer. One is that life is meant to be glad, joyous. It is pictured as

a harp. The other is, the splendour of life—  
“awake up, my glory.”

It is to a life of joy and song we are called to awake. Life is a harp. There is a legend of an instrument that hung on a castle wall. Its strings were broken. It was covered with dust. No one understood it, and no fingers could bring music from it. One day a strange visitor appeared at the castle. He saw this silent harp, took it into his hands, reverently brushed away the dust, tenderly reset the broken strings, and then played upon it, and the glad music filled all the castle. This is a parable of every life. It is a harp, made to give out music, but broken and silent until Christ comes. Then the song awakes. We are called to awake to joy and joy-giving.

“I ask, O Lord, that from my life may flow  
Such gladsome music, soothing, sweet and clear,  
From a fine-strung harp, to reach the weary ear  
Of struggling men,  
To bid them pause awhile and listen; then,  
With spirit calmer, stronger than before,  
Take up their work once more.”

Christ's life was a perpetual song. He gave out only cheer. He even started to His cross singing a hymn. When He arose He started songs with His first words, “All hail!” “Peace be unto you.” What music did you start yesterday, as you went about? What song is in your heart singing to-day? “Awake, psaltery and harp.”

But there is something else. "Awake up, my glory." Glory is a great word. It has many synonyms and definitions. It means brightness, splendour, luster, honour, greatness, excellence. Every human life has glory in itself. Did you ever try to answer the question, "What is man?" It would take a whole library of books to describe the several parts of a life. Merely to tell of the mechanism of a human hand, to give a list of the marvelous things the hand has done, would fill a volume. Or the eye, with its wonderful structure; the ear, with its delicate functions; the brain, with its amazing processes; the heart, the lungs—each of the organs in a bodily organism is so wonderful that a whole lifetime might be devoted to the study of anatomy alone, and the subject would not be exhausted.

Think, too, of the intellectual part, with all that the mind of man has achieved in literature, in invention, in science, in art. Think of the moral part, man's immortal nature, that in man which makes him like God, capable of holding communion with God, of belonging to the family of God. When we begin to think even most superficially of what man is, we see an almost infinite meaning in the word "glory" as defining life. "Awake up, my glory."

No one, even in the highest flights of his imagination, ever has begun to dream of the full content of his own life, what it is at present, then what it may become under the influence of divine



grace and love. Even now, man redeemed is but "a little lower than God." Then, "it is not yet made manifest what we shall be." The full glory is hidden, unrevealed, as a marvelous rose is hidden in a little bud in springtime. All that we know about our future is that we shall be like Christ. We are awed even by such a dim hint of what we shall be when the work in us is completed.

The call to awake implies that the glory in us is asleep. It is a call to all that is in us of beauty, of power, of strength, of good, of love, to be quickened to reach its best. We are not aware of the grandeur of our own lives. We do not think of ourselves as infolding splendour, as having in us the beauty of immortal life. We travel over seas to look at scenes of grandeur, to wander through art galleries, to study the noble achievements of architecture, while we have in ourselves greater grandeur, rarer beauty, sublimer art, than any land under heaven has to show us. Let us pray to be made conscious of our own glory. "Awake up, my glory."

We are to call out these splendours. The harp is standing silent when it might be pouring out entrancing music. The hand is folded and idle, when it might be doing beautiful things—painting a picture that would add to the sum of the world's beauty, doing a deed of kindness that would give gladness to a gentle heart, visiting a sick or suffering one and winning the commendation, "Ye did it unto me." The power of sym-

pathy is sleeping in your heart when it might be awakened and be adding strength to human weakness on some of life's battlefields, making struggling ones braver, inspiring them to victory.

Suppose, now, that all the capacity for helping others, lying unawakened in each one's heart and hand, were brought out for just one week and made to do their best,—what a vast ministry of kindness would be performed! Suppose that all of each one's capacity for praising God were called out, that every silent harp and every sleeping psaltery should be waked up and should begin to pour out praise, what a chorus of song would break upon the air! One of the Psalms begins with the call, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name." That is what this call, "Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp," means. If we truly wish our glory to be waked up, we must seek to have the best in us called out to its fullest capacity of service.

This story comes from Japan and tells how only the Bible can prove itself true. A man had obtained a Bible and became much interested in it. After reading it, he said, "This is a fine thing in theory, but I wonder how it would work in practice." On the train on which he was traveling was a lady, who, he was told, was a Christian. He watched her attentively to see how she would act, how her conduct would illustrate the Book in which she believed. He said, "If I can see any-

thing in her conduct like this Book, I will believe it." Before the day was over he had seen in her so many little acts of unselfishness and kindness, so many examples of patience and thoughtfulness, so much consideration for the comfort of her fellow passengers, that he was deeply impressed and resolved to make the Bible the guide and inspirer of his whole life. Thus it is that the glory of our life should be awakened.

In one of St. Paul's letters to Timothy he gave this young man an earnest charge. Timothy was not living at his best. St. Paul bade him stir up the gift of God that was in him. Timothy had abilities, but he was not using them worthily. God had put into his life spiritual gifts, capacities for great usefulness, but Timothy was not exercising His gifts to the full. The glory in him needed to be waked up. "Stir up the gift of God that is in thee," bade St. Paul. The picture in his words is that of a fire smouldering, covered up, not burning brightly, not giving out its heat. Timothy was bidden to stir up the fire that it might burn into a hot flame. Many Christians need the same exhortation. They have the fire in their hearts, but it needs stirring up. "Awake up, my glory."

Do you think you have been doing your best? Can you think of a day in the past week which you made altogether as beautiful as you could have made it? Could not the artist's picture have been a little more beautiful, a little broader and

nobler in its technique, a little finer in its sentiment? Could not the singer have sung her song a little better, with a little more heart, a little more sweetly? Could not the boys and girls at school have done a little better work and have been a little gentler among their schoolmates? Could not the men have been a little better Christians out in the world, and the women better, kindlier neighbours? The best day any of us ever lived, might we not have made it a little whiter, a little fuller of divine love, a little more sacred in its memories? Must not every one of us confess that the glory in us needs awakening? No doubt the body is a clog to the mind, the soul. Many of us have burning desires for holiness in our hearts, but somehow we have not the power to express the desires. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote to a friend, "You cannot sleep; well, I cannot keep awake." In the lethargic condition of his body, his magnificent intellectual powers were held as in a stupor. No doubt many men with great spiritual fervour are unable to express their earnestness of soul because they are hampered by an unwholesome somnolence. We need to call upon our souls to wake up. We need to call upon God to wake us up.

"Awake up, my glory." The word gives dignity, splendour, honour, greatness, divineness to our life. It calls us to make our lives worthy of the name. The lowliest human life is glorious in its character, in its possibility, in its destiny. Re-

cently a Sevres vase, only about sixteen inches high, was put up at auction. It was dated 1763. No history of it was given. No one knew where it came from, who made it, or who its owners had been. But the vase was so exquisite in its beauty and so surely genuine that it brought at auction twenty-one thousand dollars. Yet this rare and costly thing was once only a mere lump of common clay and a few moist colours. The value was in the toil and skill of the artist who shaped and coloured it with such delicate patience and such untiring effort. He did his best, and the vase to-day witnesses to his faithfulness. If we would only always do our best in all our work, we would live worthily of the glory that is in us.

The Parthenon at Athens was encircled within by a sculptured frieze, five hundred and twenty feet in length. It was chiefly the work of Phidias. The figures on the frieze were life-size, and stood fifty feet above the floor of the temple. For nearly two thousand years the work remained undisturbed and nearly in its original state. By the explosion of a shell, the frieze was shattered about the close of the seventeenth century and fell upon the pavement. Then it was found that in every smallest detail the work was perfect. Phidias wrought, as he said, for the eyes of the gods, for no human eyes saw his work at its great height. It is in this spirit that we should do all our work—not for men's eyes, but for God's. We should do perfect work, for no other is worthy of the doer.

“Awake up, my glory.” Do thy lightest task as beautifully as if thou wast doing a piece of heavenly ministry, and wast working for the very eye of the Master Himself.

Let us set higher ideals for ourselves. We are not dust—we are immortal spirits. We are children of God, and this dignifies the smallest, lowliest things we do. Sweeping a room for Christ is glorious work. Cobbling shoes may be made as radiant service in heaven’s sight as angel ministry before God’s throne. The glory is in us, and we must live worthily of it. Let us call out our best skill, our rarest power, for everything we do. Our days should be ascending days in the scale, each one made more beautiful than the last. We never get to the best opportunity—to-morrow will bring us into a heavenlier atmosphere than to-day’s. Kipling puts it thus in one of his poems: “There ’s no use going farther—it ’s the edge of cultivation.”

So they said, and I believed it—broke my land and sowed my crop—

Built my barns and strung my fences in the little border station

Tucked away below the foothills where the trails run out and stop.

Till a voice as bad as conscience rang interminable changes

On one everlasting whisper day and night, repeated so: “Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the ranges—

Something lost behind the ranges. Lost and waiting for you. Go.”

This is the call to us in all life. There is no end to life. There is always something beyond. Life is immortal. When our glory awakes and presses on, it will always find something waiting—something in reserve. Only heaven is the end.

“Awake up, my glory.” Shall we not make this demand upon ourselves? We are asleep and cannot wake up. Yet we must wake up or we shall perish spiritually. The parable speaks of those whom their Lord had set to watch, but whom He warned against sleeping. “Lest when he cometh and findeth them sleeping.” We need to pray for nothing more earnestly than for power to keep awake.

“Lord, wake me up; rend swift my coffin planks;  
I pray Thee, let me live—alive and free.”

We must get awake first ourselves. “Awake up, my glory.” Then it is a great thing to be an awakener of others. Some men have this power in large measure. Everyone who comes near them is quickened, becomes more widely awake, is inspired to live better. Christ waked up the glory of His disciples. They were plain men, without the education of the schools, without the art of eloquence, but they lived with their Master, and He taught them, put Himself into their lives, then sent them forth. Every particle of the glory in them was waked up, and they went out and woke up the world. That is what God wants us to do. Get awake yourself, and then wake up your friends.

Shall we be content to stay asleep any longer? Must our harps still hang silent on the wall, giving out no music? Must the glory in us continue to sleep? Shall we not rather call upon ourselves to awake and then call upon God to awake us? Then our lives shall open into beauty and into power. Then shall we be the persons God wants us to be.



## PSALM LXXII

### MESSIAH'S REIGN

**GIVE** the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. 2 He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment.—Verses 1, 2.

In the seventy-second Psalm we have a wonderful description of the ideal king. "The historical occasion of the Psalm is to be kept in mind. A human monarch stands in the foreground; but the aspirations expressed are so far beyond anything that he is or can be, that they are either extravagant flattery or reach out beyond their immediate occasion to the King Messiah."

Though we may not be justified "in attempting to transfer every point of the psalmist's prayer to the Messiah," yet we may study the words of the Psalm as a picture of Christ. He is a King whom we need never fear to trust. He is most gentle and loving. The weakest in His kingdom is sure of protection and care. Those who have failed the most sorely are sure of compassion and help—help that will restore them to strength and joy if they will but cling to Him and follow Him.

“He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment.” We are sure that our King will never be unjust to any of His subjects. He will judge always with righteousness. He will never wink at sin. He is holy, and must have holiness in His followers. This is one thought. Another is that no one will ever receive any injustice at His hands. The poor often fail of justice in human governments. They have none to plead their cause. They have no money to employ advocates. Besides, they are thrust aside by the rich and the strong and oftentimes cannot secure a hearing. But under this King the poorest and weakest are as sure of justice as the richest and the strongest. The Bible from beginning to end represents God as the Friend of the weak, the unfortunate, the defenceless, the unprotected.

“The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.” We may not read into this thought about the mountains all that modern science has taught us of the ministry of mountains in the physical economy of the earth. But we know that the mountains give beauty and strength to a country. They are also full of healthful influences. The mountains were ancient hiding places for men in danger. They are firm and fixed, emblems of perpetuity. We read of the “everlasting hills.” They are the massive foundations of the earth. They carry the valleys in their bosom and hold up the great plains in their arms. Their tall peaks catch the first

gleams of dawning day and are the last to wave farewell to the setting sun. They are sources of inestimable blessing to the plains below. Their storms and currents purify and sweeten the air. Rivers are born amid their crags. From their melting snows millions of streams flow down to water the gardens and valleys below.

In all these and other ways mountains are expressive emblems of God Himself. He is the refuge of men. In His bosom the weary and heart-sore find most kindly shelter. He is the source of infinite blessing to the world. Rivers of goodness flow from His heart, bringing joy, life, and gladness to earth's homes. Here it is said that the mountains bring peace. Probably the verse is only a poetical expression of the promise that peace shall prevail in the lands in which the Messiah reigns as King—peace in the widest sense. We know what a prominent place peace has among the spiritual blessings which Christ gives. It must be noted here that it is in righteousness that the mountains and hills bring peace to the people. There is no peace save in righteousness. We must be good before we can be happy.

“He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.” Here again we have a glimpse of the compassionate heart of Christ. He has a peculiar interest in the poor. The Bible is a book for the poor. The old Mosaic code had its special provisions for them. Every

seventh year the land was to rest, that the poor might eat the fruit that grew on the fields and vineyards. The corners were not to be reaped, nor all the grapes picked from the vine; but something was to be left always for the poor. The Psalms gleam with golden words like these: "The Lord heareth the poor;" "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me;" "He shall spare the poor and needy;" "He shall deliver . . . the poor also, and him that hath no helper." The world's heart is cold toward the poor. An Arctic explorer was asked whether he and his companions suffered much from the pangs of hunger during the eight months of starvation through which they had passed. He replied that the gnawings of hunger were lost in the sense of abandonment, in the feeling that their countrymen had forgotten them and were not coming to their rescue.

The bitterest thing about poverty is not the pain of privation, cold, and hunger; but the feeling that no one cares, the lack of sympathy and love in human hearts, the cruelty of injustice, oppression, and wrong which are the portion of the poor where the love of Christ is not known. But the Bible throbs with love and sympathy for the poor, as a mother's heart throbs for her children. We need but to look even cursorily at the story of Christ's walk among men, to see in Him the most loving interest in and sympathy with the poor. His heart was ever most gentle toward those whom men despised. The sick, the tempted,

the crippled, the blind, the outcast, the fallen, were the ones to whom His compassion went out in special tenderness. He is the same yet; the same yesterday and to-day, yea, and forever. That is the kind of king we have in Jesus Christ. None need ever fear to trust Him. The safest place in the world is in His bosom. The poorest are sure of His love.

“He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth.” This is a beautiful picture of the effect on the world of the reign of Christ. The mown field has only roots—all the beauty has been shorn off. The removal of the grass leaves the roots exposed to the fierce summer heat, which burns and parches them almost to death. This is a picture of this world under sin’s withering curse. We know what bitterness and sorrow, what burning up of life’s beauty, sin produces. Think of a country where Christ is not known, where none of the blessings of His grace have ever been received—such a country as the missionaries find when they go to India or China. For example, it used to be said that in India the birds never sing, the flowers have no fragrance, and the women never smile. This is but a poetic representation of the spiritual withering and dearth which do exist in all places where Christ’s gospel is not known.

The warm, soft rain falls upon the parched, mown field, and the effect is magical. Almost immediately the seared grass becomes green and

millions of tender blades shoot up. This beautifully illustrates the effect of the gospel wherever it goes. A boy lay very sick in a miserable garret in London. He had never known of the love of Christ. An eccentric minister entered the place, bent over the cot and said, "My boy, God loves you," and hurried away. The boy looked up in surprise. But the word the minister had spoken was a revealing of the heart of Christ to him, and transformed his life. Every spot about a mission station is a commentary on this verse. Every Christian home, every saved and renewed life, exemplifies it.

"He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." We need not trouble ourselves about geography. The verse is a promise of the universal spread of the kingdom of Christ. The world is His empire and all shall become His. It is ours to win His kingdom for Him. It is not enough to read the promise and then wait for the millennium. It is not enough for us to pray for its coming. It is ours to work to win the kingdom for the King. Enemies hold it now, and they must be dispossessed, and room must be made for Christ. Our work is to prepare the way of the Lord. We are to open doors for Him into hearts and homes. We must help in extending the dominion of Christ until it fills all the world.

"For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper." Over

and over again in this description of our King do we catch a glimpse of the gentleness of His heart toward the poor. Here we are told that He will hear the cry of the needy. There is in the one hundred and second Psalm a wonderful picture of the interest the Lord takes in those who are oppressed. "He hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth." This ought to have wonderful comfort to any who are suffering wrongfully, and for all who are in sore need. Then he "that hath no helper" has special mention. No one can ever say, "Nobody cares for me," for there is always One who cares. Christ cares. There is an incident in St. John's Gospel which illustrates this. There was lying by the pool of Bethesda a man who had been suffering for thirty-eight years. He had been waiting for a long time by the healing waters, but being lame, he was unable to get into the pool at the right time, other stronger persons always jostling him aside and thrusting themselves in. Jesus came by and saw this man who "had no helper," and at once His heart went out to him in sympathy, and He healed him. So it always is. The most needy person in our company gets the most of Christ's compassion, and the one who has no helper gets the most of the mighty help of Christ.

Usually kings pay heed to the great, the strong, the people of rank about them; but heaven's King sees first the poor and needy and listens to their

appeals. One day, in the darkest period of the war, President Lincoln was ill and gave orders that no one was to be admitted. Senators and generals and great men came, but none could see him. Then a poor woman in faded garments came, and craved to see the President. She was in great distress about her son, who was in the army and was in trouble. "Yes, admit her," said Mr. Lincoln to the messenger. So it is with our King. The poor and the needy are admitted, even though others are kept waiting. The surest appeal to the heart of Christ is sore human need.



## PSALM LXXXIV

### DELIGHT IN GOD'S HOUSE

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! 2 My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.—Verses 1, 2.

“You must have the bird in your eye before you can find it in the bush.” One who has no love for flowers will walk through fields and gardens filled with flowers and never see one of them. One who has no music in his own soul may live and move continually amid gentle harmonies and never be touched or thrilled by even the sweetest melodies. On the other hand, one who loves beauty will find it everywhere. One who has a singing angel in his own breast hears every sweet note that breathes in the air about him. Our own heart makes our world for us.

Here is a man whose heart is full of longing for the privileges of God's house. There are thousands in all ages who have the same craving. Some suppose that the writer was exiled from the sanctuary, unable to enjoy the worship of God's house. Nothing definite can be known concerning the circumstances of the writer in this case. There are always people who are prevented from attending church services which they love—those

who are sick, those who must care for the sick, or those who by other duties are compelled to miss the hours of devotion which they greatly love. Perhaps, however, the deep longings of this Psalm shows only the devout love of the worshipper for the house of God. The spirit in either case is such as should characterize every saintly soul. Love for the sanctuary should be found in every child of God.

“My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” Loss is a wonderful revealer of value. Blessings brighten as they take their flight. Many good things that we fail to appreciate when we possess them come to have to us an incalculable worth when we have lost them. An empty chair is oftentimes the first revealer of the true worth of a friend whom we but inadequately prized when we had him. No doubt the writer of this Psalm loved God's house when he enjoyed its privileges, when he could go to it freely, but now when he was shut away from it he realized as he had not done before what it had been to him. There are many people who now attend church services, without finding any especial enjoyment in them, who, if deprived for a time of the privilege, would experience a great sense of loss. We all need God. Many people treat Him very indifferently. But when the hour of need comes, and they cannot find Him, they are in great darkness.

“Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee.” Everybody ought to have a church home. There are people who now and then attend church services on special occasions, but who have no fixed church-going habits. They stay at home four or five Sabbaths, and then go some bright morning to hear the music or the sermon, or to see the people. These are not the people the Psalm describes. To “dwell” in the house of God is to love the church and be deeply interested in its worship and work, always present at its services. The church has become to them the home of their soul. These are “blessed.” They feed continually at its table. They sit in its shadows with delight. They come to it at the close of days of toil and care and struggle, and renew their strength. They find comfort there in their sorrows, light in their darkness. The blessings of those who dwell in God’s house are very rich.

Then the result as here described is very beautiful. “They will be still praising thee.” This is the outcome of such a life of devotion—continual praise. The fire burns away upon the golden altar, and the incense rises without ceasing in sweet odours. The life that dwells in constant communion with God is always a rejoicing life. Even in sorrow its song is not hushed. It is ideal spiritual life that is described in these words, “They will be still praising thee.” Always it will be a life of song. They live un-

brokenly with God. Life flows from Him into their hearts continually, and the life they now live is the divine life pulsing in them. They live with God in constant communion with Him and are ever at peace, with no fear, no sense of danger, loneliness, for in all experiences they have God. So it is that their life is a constant song, always joy, always praise.

“Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.” “Highways to Zion,” in Revised Version. To be truly blessed one must have a trust, a joy, a resource of strength, which never can be touched by any accident, by any calamity, and which never shall fail. This cannot be said of those whose confidence is in any earthly refuge, for on the brightest day the ground of this trust may be swept away. But when our strength is in God, we know that though all things else may be torn out of our hands, our happiness shall remain undisturbed and secure. Some one gives this little parable: Two birds went out one spring morning to build their nests. One found a tree by the river's edge and made her nest among its branches. The river murmured below, the sunshine played among the leaves, and the little birds were very happy. But one night there was a storm and a freshet, and the tree was torn out and carried away in the floods—nest and nestlings and all. The other bird found a crag in the mountain and built its nest in a cleft of the rock. The storm swept over it and the

floods rushed through the valley, but the nest with its nestlings was safe in the rock. The little parable needs no interpretation.

The man whose strength is in God is further described very beautifully in the Revised Version: "In whose heart are the highways to Zion." There are highways in every heart, but they are not always highways to heaven. Sometimes they are paths made by sinful thoughts and imaginations; but in the good man they are highways of prayer and love and obedience, roads that lead to heaven and God. The picture in the mind of the poet was the pouring of the people along all roads and highways toward Jerusalem to attend the feasts. Those who thronged these highways to Zion had in their hearts love for God's house and God's worship, and these are blessed. Every heart has its highway running through it. Our thoughts beat their own roads in our life. If they are clean thoughts, pure, white, loving, they make paths that lead to Zion, to God. But if our thoughts are unworthy, if they are unclean and unholy, they beat paths that run toward darkness and unworthiness.

"Passing through the Valley of Weeping, they make it a place of springs," the Revised Version has it. Probably there was somewhere in the land a gloomy gorge well known to travelers, called the Valley of Weeping. Some tragedy in the past may have given it its name, or it may have been called so because of its frightsome depth and

darkness. This dreary place is made into a place of springs, a valley of beauty and luxuriance by the rains. The meaning is very clear. The sad things in our lives are turned into joys through the love of God in our hearts. Many of heaven's richest blessings come through earth's tears, sorrows changed into joys, transfigured. Tears are dear to God. He gathers them in His bottle. Some one has been photographing a tear and describes the marvelous beauty that the sensitized plate reveals in it. Here floods of tears become showers of blessing. So it is in life through God's love and grace.

“I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” Says Mr. Spurgeon, “God's doorstep is a happier rest than downy couches within the pavilions of royal sinners.” The humblest employment in the service of God is better than to be a prince in the service of sin. The most menial work with Christ and for Him is more honourable than the most conspicuous work in the world, unblessed by Christ's smile and favour. Young men, in choosing their calling or profession, should weigh well this truth. The glamour of fame is pitiful reward for the degradation of one's life. It all comes to this,—that the life of trust in God is the only blessed life. It is better to have God, to live with God, than to have all this world's honours and riches and not have God.

“No good thing will he withhold from them

that walk uprightly." This may seem at first a surprising statement. Does God withhold no good thing from His people? We must let our thought rest on the word "good." It is not the things we want merely that God always gives—things we think are good. Perhaps they are not good things as God sees them. We must always leave to Him to decide whether they are or not. He is wiser than we are, and knows just what effect on us the things we crave would have. We must submit all our requests to Him for final revision and approval, when we make them.

This is the teaching about prayer, so prominent in the New Testament, which bids us add to all our most earnest pleadings: "Nevertheless not my will, but thine." If the thing we ask does not come, we must therefore conclude that in God's sight it is not a "good thing." Thus it comes that God's withholdings are as great blessings to us as His bestowings. There is another phrase here which we must study. It is "from them that walk uprightly" that God will withhold no good thing. It is only when we are walking obediently, in God's ways, that we have a right to claim this promise. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

## PSALM XC

### THE HOME OF THE SOUL

**LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.—Verse 1.**

We might translate it thus: "Lord, thou hast been our home in all generations." Almost the sweetest of all words is home. Home is the place of love, where love is at its best. It is the place of confidence. We do not have to be always on our guard at home. Out in the world we are not quite sure of people. We must be careful what we say in the street cars, or as we walk about and talk, for some one may overhear us and misunderstand us. We soon learn not to open our lips too freely out in public. But when we enter our home doors we can lay aside all such prudence and speak freely, without fear or distrust. Home is the place of sympathy and tenderness. We can lean our head on the bosom of love and feel the touch of kindness. If we have any trouble, we find comfort at home. If we have been foolish or have done wrong, we find pity and compassion and charity at home. If we have sorrow, there is no comfort like that which we get at home. If people wrong us outside and hurt us, if misfortune comes to us, home is a refuge for



us. There we always find a shelter. Whenever other doors are shut upon us, the home door is always open. If we are lonely and without friends out in the world, the thought of home cheers us. So long as we have a home anywhere under the stars we cannot despair. You all know what your home is to you.

Now listen again to these words, "Lord, thou art our home." Think of God in this way. There are some human friends in whose presence we feel at home. No storm touches us when we are with them. We have no fear, we are vexed by no care or anxiety, we are not annoyed by life's hard or unpleasant experiences, when they are near to us. Think of God as your home. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind rests, nestles, in thee." Peace is the very word—it is one of the greatest words in the Bible. To have God for your home is to have peace. You have no fear of man, of devils, of circumstances. St. Paul never said anything greater about the blessing of a Christian than when he declared, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." No storm ever can reach it. No danger ever can come near it. No power on earth or hell can send a thrill of anxiety into it. It is hid with Christ, in God. That is what it is to be at home with God. "Lord, thou art our home."

Charles Wagner calls his church in Paris, "The Home of the Soul." He means that the church he has built is a spiritual home for the

people who come into it. That is what every church should be. Every church should be in its community as nearly as possible what Christ would be if He lived again in human form in a house just where the church stands. Imagine Jesus living here, and people coming to Him just as they used to do when He had His home for many months at a certain number on a certain street in Capernaum. Would not our church become a wonderful Mecca for pilgrims? The weary would come to get rest. The sorrowing would come to find comfort. People having problems and perplexities would come to have them solved. Those who have stumbled and fallen would come to be forgiven and helped to start again. Mothers would come to have their children blessed. Children would flock here to get Christ's benediction. This corner would be a great resort for all who feel any need of help.

Then all who come would find a home for their souls here. We know how Christ welcomed all who came to Him. He was everybody's friend. No one was ever turned away from Him unhelped. The church should be to the people who come to it what Christ was to those who came to Him. It should be a true home of the soul. It is in a spiritual way that the church should chiefly serve us. Some people forget this and think that it is the business of the church to provide entertainment for those who come to it. We sometimes hear people say that the church does nothing to

furnish good times for the young. But frankly that is not the purpose of the church. Are schools—public schools, high schools, colleges—established to entertain those who come to them? Places of amusement are established to entertain, but the purpose of a school is to teach, to educate, to train the mind, to develop the intellect. So the mission of a church is not to amuse, to provide fun and entertainment, but to lead persons to Christ, to train them in Christian duties, to build up in them noble character, and to prepare them for usefulness and service of men.

Doctor Woodrow Wilson says: "When we say that the way to get young people to the church is to make the church interesting, I am afraid that we too often mean that the way to do this is to make it entertaining. Did you ever know the theater to be a successful means of governing conduct? Did you ever know the most excellent concert, or series of concerts, to be the means of revolutionizing a life? Did you ever know any amount of entertainment to go farther than to hold for the hour it lasted?" We need not say that the church is never to provide entertainment for its young people. There are ways in which it may do this most effectively, thus preparing the way for its graver and more serious work. But the great purpose of the church is to do people good in spiritual ways. Nevertheless, we are to do all our work in the brightest and most interesting way. It is a sin to make church serv-

ices dull and dreary; we should make them bright and attractive. We ought to have as interesting sermons as our preachers can preach. We ought to have the best devotional music we can provide. Our worship should be beautiful. But entertainment is never to be the aim—the aim must always be to honour God and make the worshippers better.

Keep in mind the theme—the church a true spiritual home, a home of the soul. Read a sentence or two from the account of the first Christian church, just after Pentecost. “All that believed were together, and had all things common; . . . and they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.” Note the points in the picture—they were together. There is a volume of meaning in the word “together.” They had all things common. The rich shared their plenty with the poor. They were constant in their attendance at the meetings for worship. They were of one accord—there was no friction, no discordant fellowship. They took their food with gladness. They were joyous in their home life and their social life. “I wonder if there is so much laughter in any other home in England as in ours,” wrote Charles Kingsley in one of his letters to his wife. We should cultivate gladness at home. Religion does not forbid fun. It makes

us joyous. They were praising Christians at Jerusalem. Then worship was full of sweet song. This first church was a home of the soul to those who belonged to it.

How can we make church a real home of the soul to all who come into it? First of all, Christ must be in it. No other name must be worshiped but His name. No other face must be seen. You remember the story of the artist who had painted a picture of the last supper. He had tried to make the Master's face so radiant, so attractive, that nothing else on the canvas would be seen. But when the picture was unveiled he heard the people talk admiringly of the silver cups, and of the embroidery on the tablecloths, with not a word about the face. He was disappointed and grieved, and taking his brush he dashed from the canvas the secondary features he had heard praised, that the blessed face alone might win men's eyes. Christ should be the great overshadowing Presence in the church. No other face should win attention. The worshippers should see only His face. Just so far as the church is filled with Christ, as He is loved and thought about and worshipped, will it be a home of the soul to those who come into it. Let us keep ourselves out of sight. Let us try to get people to love Christ, not us. Only Christ can bless and help, and comfort, and strengthen, and heal. Be sure you never put yourself in as the one the people see. Seek to be unseen, that those who come with their needs shall meet only Christ.

Let us make our church indeed Christ's church, and then it will be a home of the soul to all who enter its doors.

It must also be a church of love. God is love—it cannot be God's church unless it is filled with love. They tell us that the beloved disciple had only one sermon when he got very old, and that he preached it every Sunday—"Little children, love one another." Perhaps it seemed monotonous to have the old man say the same words every time he spoke to the people, but really there is nothing else to preach. All the commandments are summed up in this one—"Love one another." If we can get the people of a church really and truly to love each other, we will make a home of the soul for all who come in. Christ's prayer for His disciples was that they should be one. We are to live together as brethren. We are not to be a company of individuals—a thousand, two thousand distinct individualities; we are to be one, one family knit together as one. "Love suffereth long, and is kind." That is, it bears injuries and wrongs and insults and does not get cross, continues to be kind, giving love always in return for unkindness. They tell us that when the sea worm perforates the shell of the oyster, the oyster immediately by a marvelous secretion closes the wound with a pearl. That is what you do when a brother hurts you, does you some great wrong, and you as a Christian forgive him. You heal the wound in your own heart with a pearl. George

Macdonald says, "What am I brothered for if not to forgive?"

There are a great many things that happen every day in common intercourse which make it hard to keep love unruffled, but that is the lesson we are to learn if we would make our church the home of the soul for ourselves and others. Love is always a lesson only partly learned,—we must be learning it continually. It is a very long lesson—it takes all one's lifetime. A church is not a company of saints, but a mass of material for making saints. You are yet only saints in process of being made. Remember, too, that the more testing of love you have in your experience, the more opportunities you have for learning the lesson. When, to-morrow, somebody treats you rudely, says a sharp or unkind word to you, it is a new practice lesson for you. A tourist who had just been to Pike's Peak said that near the top he saw a great mass of forget-me-nots, growing in the snow. He said he never saw the flowers so blue or so fragrant as these were. The sweetest love comes out of the hardest lessons. Christians must live together in love if they would make their church a home of the soul to others. It never can be done by living together unlovingly.

Then we must have love also for all who come to us. Christ was the love of God to all who came to Him. The worst people found Him gracious. His enemies were always trying to pick quarrels with Him, but they never could. He answered all

their insults with kindness. His reply to their false accusations was silence. When they drove the nails into His hands His response was a prayer for them. Then when the suffering and sorrowing came to Him He met them with sympathy. His disciples were dull, slow learners and tried Him sorely, but He never lost patience with them. Even when His friends proved untrue, He did not chide them. He was always merciful and loving to every kind of people. He welcomed the poor. He knew no caste. The worst sinners He received graciously. If we would make our church the home of the soul to those who come into it, we must make it a church of love to all.

An English paper tells of a "glad hand" committee whose only duty was to speak pleasantly to every stranger who came to the church. One day a man came in who had not been at church for years. After service one member of this glad-hand committee came and spoke to him and shook hands with him. A little way down the aisle another welcomed him, near the door a third, then a fourth met him, and the chairman spoke to him in the vestibule. The man said he never dreamed the church was so friendly, and said he was coming again, and he did.

A good man recently told of being a stranger in a city for several months, and attending a church all the while, without ever receiving a word of kindness from anyone. The sermon and the worship may be helpful to those who come into



the church, but people need love as well as sermons. Christ met all men with love, with sympathy, with kindness. We must do the same. We do not know what burdens the stranger who comes in is bearing, how heavy his heart may be, how he is longing for the warm grasp of a hand, how much he needs a word of cheer.

Jesus had compassion upon the people. Everyone who came near to Him felt the power of His sympathy. He said He would draw men to Him. If we would win and draw men, if we would be a blessing to them, we must care for them. In one of the Psalms the writer says, "No man careth for my soul." The friends of Christ must care for souls. They must love people. They must pity sorrow, they must sympathize with infirmity and weakness. There is an old legend of a Hindu prince who was stricken with blindness. Cure was sought in all ways, but in vain. One day a hermit offered to restore the boy's sight. The people were assembled, and the hermit addressed them. He spoke of human sufferings and the sorrows of men. Hearts were touched and tears flowed down many cheeks. Then the hermit reached forth his hand and gathered the people's tears, with these touched the eyes of the prince, and he saw again. Everywhere sympathy works miracles. Those who truly and deeply care for men have power to help them. Those who are not true lovers of men can never be winners of men nor greatly helpers of men.

## PSALM XC

### NUMBERING OUR DAYS

SO TEACH us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.—Verse 12.

“They are slipping away—these sweet,  
swift years,  
Like a leaf on the current cast,  
With never a break in the rapid flow;  
We watch them as one by one they go  
Into the beautiful past.”

WHAT have we put upon the little white pages of the days of another year as one by one they were opened for us to write “our word or two” on them? What has the year brought to us? What have we given it to keep? If we had it to live over again, would we live it differently? What would we do that we have not done? What would we not do that we have done? What has our year taught us? What lessons are we going to carry over into our next year’s life?

This ninetieth Psalm is called a prayer of Moses. It is the oldest of the Psalms. Remember the wilderness of the wandering. Forty years the Israelites tarried before they entered the Promised Land. It was because of their unbelief.

They were at the gate and were about to be led into possession. But spies were sent, and their story of fear frightened the people. They dreaded to meet the giants, and refused to go over the border. History was set back forty years. Unbelief is costly.

Moses looked back over these forty lost years. He saw six thousand graves strewn along the path. No wonder a sad tone runs through his Psalm. He was one of the last survivors of the generation that had left Egypt. He thought of the disappointment that had broken so many brave men's hearts. On himself, too, part of the curse had fallen. He must die outside of the land of promise. You remember how he pleaded to be permitted to cross over Jordan.

But the saddest thing of all was that the people themselves were to blame for their disappointment. Those graves in the wilderness sin had digged. It seemed but a little sin that Moses had committed. He was terribly tried by the people's rebelliousness, lost his patience and self-control, and spoke unadvisedly. And his slip cost him his entrance into the Promised Land. We cannot tell what a moment's loss of self-control may cost us. In this Psalm Moses looks back and everywhere he sees sin's ruin and hurt. "We are consumed by thine anger." "By thy wrath are we troubled." "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee." "All our days are passed away in thy wrath."

What has been the effect on you of the experiences of the year's life? Have they hurt you? Have they left wounds on your soul? The problem of true living is to get good and blessing out of every experience. You had sorrow. Did your sorrow leave your heart sweeter and purer? Did it make you gentler, more patient, more compassionate, more mindful of others? Did it bring you nearer to God? Or did it hurt you, leaving your peace broken, your trust in God impaired, your spirit vexed and troubled?

Or you had temptation. Did your temptation make you stronger as you resisted it and overcame the tempter? That is the way we may make our temptations blessings, to make even Satan help to build up our spiritual life. An evil thought resisted and mastered leaves us not only unhurt, but stronger in the fiber of our being. But temptations parleyed with, yielded to, hurt our life. What has been the effect of the year's temptations on your life? Have you come out of them unhurt, with no smell of fire on your garments?

Or take the year's business or occupation. How has it affected your spiritual life? Business is not sinful, unless it be a sinful business. A right occupation ought always to be a means of grace. What has been the effect of your secular business on your spiritual life? Has it been helpful, strengthening, ennobling? Or take your companionships and friendships; what have they done for you in the year that is gone? Have you been

helped Godward and heavenward by them? Have they been full of sweet and good inspirations for you? Have they made a summer atmosphere for your heart, a weather in which all spiritual fruits and all beautiful things have grown and flourished?

What marks has the old year left on your life? Are you carrying hurts and scars from its experiences? Or have they helped to build up a truer, stronger, holier manhood or womanhood in you? We ought to be ever growing in whatsoever things are lovely. That is what life is meant to do for us. One writes of the "making of a man:"

As the mighty poets take  
 Grief and pain to build their song;  
 Even so for every soul,  
 Whatsoe'er its lot may be—  
 Building, as the heavens roll,  
 Something large and strong and free,—  
 Things that hurt and things that mar  
 Shape the man for perfect praise;  
 Shock and strain and ruin are  
 Friendlier than the smiling days.

"Teach us to number our days." What is it to number our days? One way is to keep a careful record of them. That is a mathematical numbering. Some people keep diaries and put down everything they do—where they go, what they see, whom they meet, the books they read.

But mere adding of days is not the numbering that was in the thought of Moses. There are days in some lives that add nothing to life's treasures, and that leave nothing in the world which will make it better or richer. There are people who live year after year and might as well never have lived at all. Adding days is not living. If that is all you are going to do with the new year, you will only pile up an added burden of guilt. Why do not people think of the sin of wasting life? If you saw a man standing by the sea and flinging diamonds into the water, you would say he was insane. Yet some of us are standing by the sea and flinging the diamond days, one by one, into its dark floods. Mere eating and sleeping and reading the papers and going about the streets and putting in the time is not living.

Another way of numbering our days is illustrated by the story of a prisoner who when he entered his cell put on the wall marks for all the days he would have to stay there. Then each evening he would rub off one of these marks. He had one day less to stay. Some people seem to live much in this way. Each evening they have a day less to live. Another day is gone, with its opportunities, its privileges, its tasks and responsibilities—gone beyond recall. Now, if the day has been filled with duty and love and service, its page written all over with pure, white thoughts and records of gentle deeds, it is well; its passing need not be mourned over. But merely to have

to rub it off at the setting of the sun, leaving in it nothing but a story of idleness, uselessness, selfishness, and lost opportunities, is a sad numbering.

“Who ’s seen my day?  
’Tis gone away,  
Nor left a trace  
In any place.  
If I could only find  
Its foot-fall in some mind,  
Some spirit-waters stirred  
By wand of deed or word,  
I should not stand at shadowy eve  
And for my day so grieve and grieve.”

What is the true way of numbering our days? The prayer tells us. “Teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” That is, we are so to live that we shall get some new wisdom out of each day to carry on with us. Life’s lessons cannot all be learned from books. The lessons may be set down in books, but it is only in actual living that we can learn them. For example, patience. You may learn all about patience from a sermon, from a teacher, or from a book, even from the Bible. But that will not make you patient. You can get the patience only by long practice of the lesson in life’s experiences. Or take gentleness. You can read in a few paragraphs what gentleness is, how it lives. But that will not make you gentle. Take thoughtfulness. You can learn in a short lesson what it is and

how beautiful it is. But you will not be thoughtful the moment you have learned the definition. It will probably take you several years to get the beautiful lesson learned.

We talk of learning from the experience of others. It would seem that we ought to learn much in this way. Why cannot an old man who has passed through many years tell you, a young man, what he has learned in living, so that you may profit from his experience? He can tell you many things; you may learn, too, from books. But after all, the great lessons of life we must learn for ourselves, by our own failings, stumbling, trying, suffering, by our own mistakes and the enduring of their consequences.

The thought in the prayer is that out of the experience of our days we should get a heart of wisdom. Some people never do. Solomon said, "Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him." There are plenty of such fools yet. They make the same mistake over and over, suffering always from it in the same way, yet never learning wisdom from the experience. Why should we not learn? We should put our experiences to the test. What has been the effect upon us of this habit, of this kind of reading, of this amusement, of this friendship, of this method of business?

There is another way of getting a heart of wisdom from the passing days. St. Paul taught



us the lesson of moving forward and onward by oblivion of the past, and a great truth lies in his words. We are not to stay in our past as one would stay in a prison, but should be ever leaving it and going into new fields. We are not to stay by our past as if it held all that is precious for us of life, sitting down by its graves and weeping inconsolably there. We are to turn our faces ever to the future, because there new things wait for us, new duties, new joys, new hopes. Our past should be to us a seed-plot in which grow a thousand beautiful things planted in the experience of by-gone days. Our to-day is always the harvest of all our yesterdays. We never can cut off our past and leave it behind us; its consequences will always follow us and cling to us and live in us.

“Why cry so many voices choked with tears,  
‘The year is dead’? It rather seems to me  
Full of such rich and boundless life to be,  
It is a presage of the eternal years.  
Must it not live in us while we, too, live?  
Part of ourself are now the joys it brought;  
Part of ourself is, too, the good it wrought  
In days of darkness. Years to come may give  
Less conflict, less of pain, less doubt, dismay,—  
A larger share of brightness than this last;  
But victory won in darkness that is past  
Is a possession that will far outweigh  
All that we have lost. So let us rather cry,  
‘This year of grace still lives; it cannot die.’”

We are not to forget the things that are past in any but a wise and good sense. Progress is the law of true living. Everything beautiful in our past we are to keep and carry forward with us. We leave childhood behind us when we go forward to manhood or womanhood, but all that is lovely and good in childhood and all its lessons and impressions and visions, we keep in our maturer life. We cannot forget the sorrow which the year brought, nor leave it behind—it is too sacred and too much part of our life ever to be outgrown; but the memory of the sorrow should stay in our heart as a benediction, sweetening our life,—no more bitter, but accepted in love and trust and enriching us by its holy influence.

“Fields of the past shall be to thee no more  
The burial-ground of friendships once in bloom,  
But seed-plots of a harvest on before,  
And prophecies of life with larger room  
For things that are behind.

“Live thou in God, and thy dead past shall be  
Alive forever with eternal day;  
And planted on His bosom thou shalt see  
The flowers revived that withered on the way,  
Amid the things behind.”

So nothing beautiful that faded or vanished in our past year is really lost to us. If we have numbered our days aright, the old year's experiences will tell on all our future years, and will make them all richer, sweeter, truer, fuller of life and good.

## PSALM XCVII

### SOWING SEEDS OF LIGHT

LIGHT is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.—Verse 11.

LIGHT is one of the commonest words in the Bible. It means cheer, joy, life, whatever is bright and beautiful. Christ is light. We are to walk in the light of holiness. We are to shine as lights. Light is promised in all our darkness if we follow Christ. Gladness, too, is a word we all understand. It is the absence of sorrow, it is rippling laughter, it is pleasure, happiness.

There is nothing remarkable in the assurance of light and gladness for the righteous and the upright in heart. That is the teaching of the whole Bible. The ways of holiness are the ways of peace. The remarkable thing in this promise is the way the light and gladness are said to come to us. "Light is sown." The figure of sowing is striking—light coming in seeds planted like wheat, or like flower seeds. Our blessings are sown for us, to grow up in fields and gardens, and we gather them as we reap our harvests or pluck lovely flowers. That is, our good things do not come to us full-grown, but as seeds.

The figure of seed is common in the Bible as

applied in a spiritual way. God's words are seeds; sown in hearts' soil, they grow up into plants of beauty. Acts are seeds. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Here the figure seems natural. But it is remarkable to read of light being sown—that God sows light in the form of seeds in life's furrows, and that we have to cultivate them and harvest them. The figure is found in literature. The old Latin poet writes of the morning dawn:

And now, Aurora, from the saffron-bed  
Of her Tithonus rising, sow'd the earth  
With dewy light.

So Milton writes:

Now morn, her rosy steps in the eastern clime  
Advancing, sowed the earth with Orient pearl.

But this Scripture word is not poetry merely. There is a deep meaning in the figure. We know what seed is. It contains only in germ the plant, the tree, or the flower which is to be. It is in this way that all earthly life begins. When God wants to give an oak to the forest, He does not set out a great tree full-grown; He plants an acorn. When He would have a harvest of golden wheat waving on the field, He does not work a miracle and have it spring up over night—He puts into the farmer's hand a bushel of wheat grains to scatter in his furrows. The same law holds in the moral and spiritual life. "The king-

dom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree." So a noble life begins in a little seed, a mere point of life. It is at first only a thought, a suggestion, a desire, a choice, a decision, a holy purpose. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth."

The picture here is of God sowing light and gladness for us. He gives us blessings as seeds which He buries in the furrows of our lives, so that they may grow in due time and develop into beauty and fruitfulness. When you look at a seed you do not see all the splendour of life which will unfold from it at length. All you see, perhaps, is a little brown and unsightly hull, which gives no prophecy of the beauty that will spring from it when it is planted, and dies, and grows up.

Many of the seeds of life came first as unwelcome things. They did not shine as beams of radiant light. They were not glad things. They may have been burdens, disappointments, sufferings, losses. But they were seeds, with life in them. God was sowing light and gladness for you in these experiences which were so hard to endure.

Think of the way Christ sowed light and gladness for men in His life on the earth. What was He doing in those beautiful years of His, in those

days of sharp temptation, in those hours of suffering? "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." He was sowing seeds of light and gladness, the blessing of whose brightness and joy we are receiving now. The tears that fell at Bethany and on Olive's brow, the blood-drops that trickled from the cross on Golgotha—these all were seeds of light sown to give peace, joy, comfort, and life along these centuries of Christian faith.

Or think of the promises of God in the Bible as seeds of light sown in the fields of the holy word. Deserts are made to blossom as the rose wherever the sower goes forth to sow. One of these seeds of promise falls into an unblessed home and it is changed from hatred, bitterness, strife, jealousy to a place of gentleness, love, kindness, song. Every divine promise is a seed of light. Take it into your heart and it shines there, changing everything into beauty.

Or take another class of illustration. Every duty given to us is a seed of light which God has sown for us. Many of us do not like duty. A good woman, speaking of something which some one was urging her to do and which she was trying to evade, said, "I suppose it must be my duty, I hate it so." Ofttimes our duties at first seem distasteful, even repulsive. They have no attraction for us. But when we accept them and do them, they are transformed. We begin to see the good in them, the blessing to ourselves, the help to others. Seeds are sometimes dark and

rough as we look at them, but when they are planted there springs up a beautiful tree or a flower. So disagreeable tasks when done appear bright and glad.

One tells of a homely picture in common life which heartens humdrum lives. It shows a poor, discouraged-looking horse in a treadmill. Round and round he tramps in the hot, dusty ring, not weary so much of the toil, but more of its endlessness and its seeming bootlessness. But there is more of the picture. The horse was harnessed to a beam from which a rope reached down the hill to the river's edge, and there it was seen that the horse was hoisting stones, and helping to build a great bridge on which by and by trains would run, carrying freight of lives. This transformed the horse's treadmill tramping into something worth while. There are people, men and women, in workshops, in homes, in trades, in the professions, who grow weary of the drudgery, the routine, the self-denial, with never a word of praise, of commendation. But if we could see what these unhonoured toils, struggles, and self-denials accomplish, the blessings they carry to others, the bridges they help to build on which others cross to better things, the drudgery, the hard work, the self-sacrifice would appear in new light, and the picture would be transformed. It is in these commonplace tasks, these lowly ministries, that we find our life's true beauty and glory.

Every duty, however unwelcome, is a seed of light. To evade it or neglect it is to miss a blessing; to do it is to have the rough seed burst into beauty in the heart of the doer. We are continually coming up to stern and severe things, and often we are tempted to decline doing them. If we yield to such temptations, we shall reap no joy from God's sowing of light for us; but if we take up the hard task, whatever it is, and do it, we shall find blessing. Every duty is a seed of light.

Again, God sows His seeds of light and gladness in the providences of our lives. Sometimes, indeed, we cannot see anything beautiful in them, or anything good. Many of the providences in all our lives come to us first in forbidding form. They come to us as losses, sufferings, disappointments. Yet they are seeds of light, and in due time the light will break out. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit." The light is hidden and first does not shine out; yet in the end it is manifested. This is the key to life's sorrows. They appear destructive at first, but afterwards light shines out in them. We dread adversity, but when its work is finished, we find that we are enriched in heart and life. We do not receive with confidence the hard things that come to us; afterwards we learn that there were blessings in them.

So it is in all life. God is ever bringing to us good, never evil. He is a sower. He goes be-



fore us and scatters the furrows full of seeds of light. It is not visible light that He sows, but dull seeds, carrying hidden in them the secret of light. Then at the right time the light breaks forth and our way is made bright. There is not a single dark spot in our path, if only we are living righteously. There are places which seem dark as we approach them. We are afraid, and ask, "How can I get through this point of gloom?" But when we come to it, the light shines out and it is radiant as day.

According to the legend, our first parent was in great dread as the first evening of his life approached. The sun was about to sink away below the horizon. He trembled at the thought of the disaster which would follow. But the sun went down silently, and lo! ten thousand stars flashed out. The darkness revealed far more than it hid. So for every darkness in our life, God has stars of light ready to shine. Everywhere guidance is ready when we do not know the way, comfort when we are in sorrow, strength when we are weak and faint.

We need never dread hardness, for it is in the things that are hard that the seeds of light are hidden. The best things never are the easiest things. The best men are not grown in luxury and self-indulgence. We dread crosses, but it is only in cross-bearing that we find life's real treasures. He that saves his life shall lose it, but he that loses his life for Christ saves it. In every

cross God hides the seeds of light; accept the cross, take it up, and the light will shine out. The darkest spot earth ever saw was about the cross of Christ the day Jesus hung there. There were no stars to be seen. Not a gleam of light was visible. But to-day the cross is the brightest, most glorious place in all the world.

Take the picture into your heart—this world is a great field on which God has sown light and gladness. There is not anywhere a path in which these seeds of light are not hidden, and where they will not grow up and pour out their brightness at the moment of need. God does not mean that we shall ever be in darkness.

Then God wants us also to be sowers, every one of us, every day, wherever we go. The question is, What kind of seeds do we sow? The Master in one of His little stories tells us of an enemy, who, after the farmer had scattered good seed on his field, came stealthily and sowed tares among the wheat. What seed did you sow yesterday? Did you plant only pure thoughts, good thoughts, holy thoughts, gentle, loving thoughts in the little gardens of people's lives where you sowed? It is a fearful thing for anyone to put an evil thought into the mind of another. It is a fearful thing for anyone to let a debasing thought into his own heart. George Eliot says, "With the sinking of high human trust, the dignity of life sinks too: we cease to believe in our own better self, since that also is a part of

the common nature which is degraded in our thoughts; and all the finest impulses of the soul are dulled."

A sower went forth to sow. He sowed only good seed. We have seen how God sows seeds of light and seeds of gladness everywhere. That is what He wants every one of us also to do. He wants us to make the world brighter, happier. Some people do neither. Many sow gloom, shadow, discouragement, wherever they go. They sow sadness, pain, grief. If we are this sort of sower we are missing our mission, and disappointing our Lord.

Think of one who, wherever he goes, sows seeds of light, gladness. His life is pure, for only clean hands can sow seeds of light. He is a friend of men as his Master was. He does not love himself—he never thinks of himself. He never seeks his own ease. He never spares himself when any other one needs his service. He wishes only to do good to others, to make them better, to make them gladder. No matter how others treat him, he keeps on loving them. He will go miles to be kind to one who has been unkind to him, to show a favour to one who has treated him ungraciously. He is ever sowing seeds of light. The home he visits is brighter for months just because he was there. The words he said that day never are forgotten. The little things he did are remembered and leave a fragrance that will never depart.

Shall we not all go out every morning to repeat our Master's sowing everywhere? Let us be just, paying our debts of love; let us be more than just, giving more than we owe. Let us go two miles when one would be enough. Let us be sowers of light and gladness. Thus shall we help Christ to save the world, to fill it with light and love.

“If thou art blest,  
Then let the sunshine of thy gladness rest  
On the dark edges of each cloud that lies  
Black in thy brother's skies.  
If thou art sad,  
Still be thou in thy brother's gladness glad.”

## PSALM CIII

### A CALL TO PRAISE

BLESS the Lord, O my soul : and all that is within me, *Bless* his holy name.—Verse 1.

THERE is not a single sad note in all this Psalm,—it is all joy. There is not a sentence of prayer in the Psalm,—it is all praise. And have you noticed that there are in the Bible very many more calls to praise than to prayer? There is a great deal also about prayer. It is the very breath of life. By prayer we come in touch with God, let His Spirit into our hearts. The man who does not pray cuts himself off from God. Prayer is essential. There are many words about prayer in the Bible. We are to pray without ceasing. A day without prayer is a day of peril. Yet it is to be noticed that praise is pressed as a duty even more repeatedly than prayer.

The Book of Psalms is full of calls to praise. All creatures are called to praise God. Then the last word in the book sums up in one sentence the burden of all the one hundred and fifty Psalms. “Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord.” And not only things that have breath, but things as well that do not breathe,—“all deeps :

fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind, . . . mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars." Even animals which are not supposed to have souls, not to have a spiritual nature, seem to have in them a spirit of gratitude which leads them to remember favours and kindnesses and express their gratified feelings in unmistakable ways. There is a story of one who was hiding from his enemies when one day a lion came into the cave where he was in great distress. He had trodden upon a huge thorn which had pierced his foot. His pain was very great. The man took out the thorn and cared gently for the great beast till his foot was well. Years afterward the man was about to suffer martyrdom by being thrown to the lions in the arena when this lion recognized him and sheltered him. He had not forgotten the kindness and repaid it.

The Psalm pictures a good man, seeking to wake up his heart and life to praise. "All that is within me, bless his holy name." Think of all that is within you, all the powers of mind, the powers of heart, the powers of service. Think of all the bodily powers and functions, all the mental gifts and capacities, all the possibilities of love and of helpfulness. He sees the great organ silent, not giving out a note of music, and he calls upon it to awake and pour out all its song. Every power of his being he would wake up to praise.

Praise is the highest function of life. The

ancients said that the angel of praise was the greatest of all the angels. He sings only once and breathes out his life in his one song. We never can reach the best possibilities of our nature till all that is within us unites in praising God. Think of the reasons why we ought to praise God. Some of the reasons are given in this Psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." How often we do forget God's benefits! What benefits has God bestowed upon us? Here are some of them: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

These are only a few of the benefits which God bestows. The New Testament brings a new revealing. Jesus was the first to tell us that God is our Father. This name shows us the divine heart. Certain teachers and philosophers are telling us that God does not care for us. But if He is our Father and we are His children, does He not care? Can we but praise a God to whom we owe such blessings?

Yet listen any day, the fairest day of the year, the day when the sun shines brightest and the sky is the bluest, to the complainings, the murmurings, the repinings of the people you meet. Often those who have the most reasons for praise complain the most. In the morning they complain about the night, its heat or its cold, its noise or its lone-

liness, its pain or its wakefulness. In the evening they complain of the day's toil and their weariness, the annoyances, the disappointments, the frets, the unreasonable people they have had to meet. It seems that almost nothing goes well with them. The habit of discontent has grown so strong in them that they are never altogether pleased with anything. In the most perfect circumstances they can find some flaws. In the loveliest picture they always see something to object to, to criticise, something to complain of. No matter what the weather is, there is always something disagreeable about it. The person you are commending is of unexceptional character. His life is beautiful. He has done great good in the community. But when his qualities are extolled and his noble service declared, the complainer brings up some "but"—something that seems to derogate from the nobleness, the excellence, the good reputation of your friend. The trouble with such people is that they look always for flaws and specks. They do not wish to find the beautiful things, and of course they never do find them.

What these people need is not better circumstances, more good things, all things made different to suit their tastes—what they need, the only thing that will really cure them of their miserable habit of grumbling and unhappiness is a new heart, being born again, with a contented spirit, ears that will bring the voice from heaven to them, not as thunder, but as the music of an



angel. What they need is a thanksgiving spirit, a praising spirit. Then they will look for the good and not the evil in the things about them.

The fact is, there are a thousand beautiful things in any outlook on life you may have to one unpleasant thing. Find the loving things, and do not look at all on the bit of marring. Then you would easily forget the one little thorn in the great mass of roses. The trouble is, however, with too many, that they think only of the thorn, the one small defect or flaw, or discomfort, and forget altogether the roses, the thousand rich and gracious and blessed favours. "Forget not all his benefits," runs the lesson, but this is the very thing they do—they forget all God's wonderful mercies, the countless blessings that flood their days with sunshine and strew their nights with stars. An hour's pain, even a moment's twinge of suffering, blots out the memory of a whole year of health.

There is a legend of two particular angels that come out from heaven every morning and go on their errand all the day. One is the angel of prayer and the other the angel of thanksgiving. Each carries a great basket filled to overflowing. Everybody pours into it an armful of requests. But when the day is ended the angel of thanksgiving has only two or three little words of gratitude in his basket. This is not a caricature. Most of us do more or less praying, but it is nearly all the unloading of our burdens, our fears, our

wants, our clamourous requests for favours, with only here and there a feeble word of thanks for blessings received. Watch the prayers you hear others make—is there much thanksgiving? Watch your own praying—what proportion of it is request, asking, beseeching, and what proportion praise?

Some ingenious gatherer of statistics tells us that in a certain year many thousands of letters reached the Dead Letter Office in Washington before Christmas, from children, addressed to Santa Claus, but that a whole month after Christmas only one letter came to Santa Claus with a message of thanks. Ten lepers were cleansed, all receiving the same great blessing, but only one of them returned to thank the Healer. Where were the nine?

We need to think seriously of this matter. We are pitifully wanting in gratitude. Thanksgiving languishes on our lips. Some of us do little but complain. Nothing altogether pleases us. We have no eyes for the good things of divine love which really flood our lives.

Take another line of this thought of praise. We will never grow to be very fine workmen in any department of life, to amount to much among men, or to reach much beauty of character, until we get this quality of praise into our heart and life. It is said of a great artist that he always held a lyre in his hand while he painted. Music inspired his art. This was one of the secrets of

his superb work as an artist—his heart was glad and praising. No one can do his best work with a sad heart. If you are in sorrow, another's grief will not comfort you. He who would come to you as an uplifter must have joy to bring you. It would be well if all of us should learn to hold a harp in one hand as we work with the other. Our work, whatever it is, would be better done. "The joy of the Lord is your strength," said Nehemiah to his people when he found them weeping and exhorted them to a better life. They must dry their tears if they would reach anything noble and beautiful.

It is always so. No sad life ever reached its best possibilities. The men who have done the noblest and worthiest things, who have achieved the most, whose work shines as most beautiful and radiant, sang while they wrought. Pessimism has never done any lovely things; only he who works with a song adds to the brightness and beauty of the world. Gloomy people are perverting their powers, growing thorns instead of roses. The joyless man is a misanthrope. He makes it harder for other people to live, makes them less strong to bear their burdens. He chills the ardour he ought to kindle to a redder glow. He is a discourager of every man he meets. The hopeless pessimist is a traitor to his fellows—he is their enemy. He does them harm.

On the other hand, he who lives with a song on his lips is a blessing to everyone he meets.

He does better work himself, paints more beautiful pictures, is a better teacher, a better lawyer, a better merchant, an infinitely better physician. No man should ever go into a sick room as a doctor who has not music in his heart. No man ever can be fit to be a preacher who is not a joyous man, a praising man. The word of the physician and the preacher is spoken among those who are suffering, those who have fears and anxieties, those who need cheer, courage, hope; and only those who know the joy of Christ can help others to overcome.

The emblem of Christian life is light, and light means joy, praise. Imagine light pessimistic. Some people used to think that solemnity was an essential quality of religion. The man who smiled on Sunday desecrated the holy day. He who was glad-hearted in worship was irreverent. Laughter was thought to be a sin. It is said there was an ancient law which banished roses from Jerusalem. But there really is no piety in long-facedness. Christ did not wear a long face, but one that always shone. Jesus said He would have His joy fulfilled in His followers. If you would become a beautiful Christian, you must be a joyous Christian. Joy is always lovely. It shines. It is fragrant. It makes the air brighter and sweeter. It is a wondrous inspirer of life. You can do twice as much work when you are glad and praising as when you are gloomy, downcast, and do it twice as well.

The other day one told of starting out sad and heavy-hearted in the morning, with no song, no hope, no praise, not a thought of gladness in the heart. Everything dragged. There seemed nothing worth living for. Circumstances were most distressing. There appeared only blackness before the eyes. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, something happened which changed all the outlook. Light broke in upon the gloom. The friend said that if an angel of God had come into the dreadful tangle with light and song the effect could not have been more marvelous. It was joy that came, and the joy changed everything. One wrote:

Going up the hill, I found it long  
Until I met a merry song  
That kissed mine eyes to blind me.  
It mocked at me, and turned and fled,  
But played on, fluttering overhead,  
Till I forgot I went footsore,  
And the dusty hill that rose before  
Was the blue hill far behind me.

Does all that is within us bless the Lord? Is every pipe of the organ full of music? Is the harp within us awake? Is the song rising continually from our lips? Let us take with us everywhere the lesson of praise.

A writer tells of a boy who was sunny and brave, as many boys are. This boy had met the ills of life, which too many people regard as al-

most tragedies, with pluck and courage. But one day something serious happened. He and a playmate climbed a tree. Just when our little philosopher reached the top, his foot slipped and he fell to the ground. He lay there, but uttered no cry. It was his playmate that screamed. The doctor found the leg and hip badly broken. The boy bore the setting patiently, without a whimper. The mother slipped out of the room to hide her own tears; she couldn't stand it as well as her boy did. She heard a faint sound from the room where he was lying, and hurried back, almost hoping to find him crying.

"My boy," she said, "do you want something? I thought I heard you call."

"Oh no, mother," he said, "I didn't call; I just thought I'd try singing a bit." And he went on with the song.

When you have pain, or struggle, or a heavy load, or a great anguish, don't complain, don't cry out, don't sink down in despair, don't be afraid—try singing a bit.

## PSALM CIII

### FORGETTING HIS BENEFITS

**BLESS** the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.—Verse 2.

EVERY part of our being should join in praising God. The song of praise we sing should not be a solo, a duet, or even a quartet, but a full chorus, the feelings, the affections, the mental powers, the tastes, the desires, all mingling in harmony and praise. There are some who praise with their voices, but not with their hearts. Others give intellectual worship while their affections are not engaged. Others give emotional praise, but their wills and consciences do not join in the song; they have good feelings, but lack in practical obediences and in devotion to duty. Some sing missionary hymns with zest, but give nothing to missionary work; or consecration hymns, and then live for themselves. There is no heavenly music in such singing. The true way is to arouse every faculty and energy and power and affection to hearty, enthusiastic, practical praise.

“Forget not all his benefits.” Many people have excellent memories for troubles, adversities,

losses, and sorrows, but cannot remember the mercies and blessings of their lives. It is very unfortunate to have such defective memories. Suppose God would forget us for a time, and fail to provide for our daily wants, and fail to send us His ordinary gifts for a whole day, or even for an hour, how sore a misfortune it would be! Yet we forget continually that our blessings come from Him. We take them as a matter of course, and never think of the Giver. Sometimes we do not think of God for hours together. Yet there is never a moment when God is not thinking of us and providing for us. Perhaps if there were some break in the flow of blessings we should learn to be more thankful. The very unbroken continuity of gifts makes us oblivious to their source. Some one kept a book for a daily record of blessings. It would be a good thing for all of us to do. Surely this matter is important. We think others very ungrateful who forget our little kindnesses to them. Must we not judge ourselves by the same judgment in relation to God's goodness?

“Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.” What an enumeration of divine blessings, and what blessings they are, too, in this and the following verses! They are all blessings, too, which the world cannot give. Any one of them is worth more than all earth's treasures combined. If we are not forgiven, we must rest forever under the curse of sin, a weight



greater than all the Alps; but God forgives, and forgives all our sins, and forgives fully and forever. If we are not healed we must be sick forever, sick with the plague and leprosy of sin; but God heals, and heals all our diseases, heals completely. If we are not saved from the destructive dangers of this world, we never can reach heaven; but God keeps, rescues, redeems our life. Earth's crowns are made of thorns, and at the best are only what the children call "play-crowns," for they are only of leaves that wither, or of gold and gems that fire will destroy; but God crowns His people with crowns of loving-kindness and tender mercies, which are real and radiant, which shall never fade, but shall shine forever, becoming crowns of eternal life and glory in heaven. This world cannot satisfy a heart's cravings. Its possessions only make the hunger more intense; but God satisfies the souls of His people, meets all their cravings and hungers. These are some of the things for which we have to praise God.

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." The prodigal's father waited years in love—how slow to anger! and then ran to meet his returning son—how quick in mercy! The Koran says two angels attend every man on the earth, one on each side of him. At nightfall when he sleeps they fly up to heaven with reports of his words and acts for the day. Every good thing is recorded at once and repeated ten times, that no item may be omitted. But

when they come to his sinful things, the angel on the right says: "Forbear for seven hours to write this down. Peradventure he may awaken in the night and be sorry and repent and pray and obtain forgiveness." The angel is slow to record the man's sins. Is this not a true picture of God's treatment of us? He is slow to anger, but quick to show mercy.

"He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever." These are wonderful pictures of the way God forgives. The best human forgiveness is very imperfect. Men forgive, but they often "chide" and "keep anger." They say they "forgive but cannot forget;" they keep the memory of the wrong always in their hearts, never forgetting, even while showing us favours, that once we injured them. The old memories of wrongs block up the channel of love as old wrecks block up a river, arresting its flow. But God does not chide nor keep anger. His heart is like the smooth lake which the driving keel cleaves, but which soon becomes calm and placid again, retaining no mark or trace of the rude furrowing. He puts away our sins as far as the east is from the west, that is, infinitely. This was taught in the ancient ceremony of the scapegoat. One goat was killed and its blood sprinkled before God; this meant the atonement of Christ by which our forgiveness is procured. The other goat then, after the priest had confessed over its head the people's sins, was led away out of sight, into the

wilderness, and let loose, never to return again; thus bearing away the sins of the nation to an infinite distance, so that they could never come back again to disturb those who had been forgiven. There is a wonderful passage in Jeremiah which reads: "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve."

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." This is one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible. It brings God very near to us. It shows us His heart. He is not cold and far removed from us in feeling, indifferent to our sufferings, stern and severe in His judgment upon us. Rather, He is pitiful, like a human father in his pitifulness toward his children. The best commentary on these words is Christ's own life. See Him moved with compassion for the sick, the lepers, the sorrowing, the sinful, the fallen; weeping by a grave at Bethany, deeply touched at Nain as He saw the widowed mother following her only son to the grave; weeping again over Jerusalem because the people would not repent and receive Him. All this is commentary on this precious verse.

"For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." God does not treat us as if we were strong and holy and unfallen. He does not forget that we are weak, that it is hard for

us in our fallen condition to live right, that we are easily tempted and overcome. Therefore, He is very patient and gentle with us when we have sinned, binding up the wounds, restoring the soul. We ought to get a great deal of comfort out of these words. You say you are so weak that you cannot resist temptation. Yes, and does not God know it? You are weary and worn out through trouble or burden-bearing, but God knows all about it. You find your work very hard, and cannot see how you are ever to get through with it; but God knows. He knows your frailty; He remembers that you are only dust. He is pitiful and compassionate, and gives always needed help. There is immeasurable comfort in the knowledge that Christ lived through the whole gamut of human life and experience. He knows all about temptation, for He was tempted in all points like as we are. He knows all about sorrow, for He was acquainted with grief. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, for He was tried in every way in which we are tried.

“As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.” A dear young friend has just brought to my table a cluster of beautiful flowers. They charm my eye, and their fragrance fills my room. But to-morrow they will be withered and dead, and I shall be compelled to put them out of my sight. So it is with human lives. They may be very lovely and sweet, but

soon they are gone, and there is only a memory left behind. As we think of this we grow sad, and ask, "What is there that is abiding?" Above our heads is the blue sky, and when night comes the brilliant stars look down and say, "We do not fade." We have shone upon all the passing generations of men, and still are bright as ever." There is comfort in that—there is something at least which does not pass away in a day. But here is something better still: the mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting. Here is a bosom, then, on which we may lean and know that our repose shall never be disturbed. Would you be safe eternally? Rest your hopes on God's everlasting mercy, and not on any frail thing of earth.

"To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them." All God's promises and blessings have conditions. We have something to do to get them. Here the condition is obedience. There is a covenant. There is a covenant, and it has two sides. There is not the slightest doubt about God's faithfulness. He will do His part. But we have a part to do, too. It is to those who do His commandments that the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. It is important to remember the commandments, but this is not enough. A great many people remember them and can repeat them verbatim who do not obey them. The stress of emphasis is on the word "do." So if we want

to claim and secure the blessings here promised we must be sure that we do our part and fulfill the conditions of God's covenant of grace. If this Psalm is a palace of love, here in this verse is the gate beautiful by which all must enter in who would enjoy its rich gladness and blessedness.

## PSALM CVII

### SPEAK OUT YOUR MESSAGE

**LET** the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.—Verse 2.

**THERE** is a duty of keeping silent. There are times when we would better not say anything. There come thoughts and feelings into our hearts which we would better not speak out. There are moments when silence is golden. But there is also a duty of speech. God has given us our tongues to be used. The world needs the true words that lie within our lips. There are times when silence would be ingratitude, even disloyalty. “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.”

If God has redeemed us, how can we but “say so”? It is disloyal for us to hide in our heart the wonderful story of what God has done for us. Our Lord was hurt by the action of the lepers who had been healed by Him and did not return to give praise to God. One came back—a Samaritan, and then Jesus asked, “Where are the nine?” We ought to give God our gratitude when He has blessed us. Rescue from danger, recovery from sickness, the restoration of a friend

from death's door, deliverance from trouble, prosperity in business, kindness shown at large cost which has brought great good—our lives are full of the goodness and loving-kindness of God. Surely there ought to be a great deal of praise in our life. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."

But to say it to God in the secrecy of our closet of prayer is not enough. We ought to tell others that God has redeemed us. We owe it to Him to honour His name among men. Then we owe it to our fellows, also, to let them know what God has done for us. They have needs, trials, hungers, just like those in which God has comforted us; shall we not tell them where we were consoled in our sorrow, where we found companionship in our loneliness, friendship in our heart-hunger, deliverance in our temptation, guidance in our bewilderment and perplexity, that they may find the same in their like need? "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."

Then, God gives us messages to carry to others. He puts into the heart of every one of His creatures something which He wants that creature to utter to the world. He puts into the star a message of light;—you look up into the heavens at night and the star gives you its message. Who knows what a benediction the star may be to a weary traveler who finds his way by it, or to the sick man lying by his window, and in his sleeplessness looking up at the glimmering point of



light in the calm, deep heaven? God gives to a flower a message of beauty and sweetness, and for its brief life it tells out its message to all who can read it. Who can count up the good that even a flower may do, as it blooms in the garden, or as it is carried into the sick room, or into the cheerless chamber of poverty? Especially does God give to every human life a message to deliver. To one it is some new scientific revelation. To the poet God gives thoughts of beauty which he is to interpret to the world, and the world is richer, sweeter, and better for hearing his messages. Think what we owe to the men and women who along the centuries have given forth their songs of hope, cheer, comfort, and inspiration! To every one of us God gives something that He wants us to say to others. We cannot all write poems, or books which shall bless men; but if we live near the heart of Christ, there is no one of us into whose ear He will not whisper some fragment of truth, some revealing of grace and love, or to whom He will not give some experience of comfort in sorrow, some new glimpse of glory. God forms a personal friendship with each one of His faithful children, and each one learns something from Him which no other one ever has learned. Your message is not the same as mine; it is God's own word to you, and you are His prophet to foretell it to the world. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."

If only one of the flowers that blooms in the

summer days in the fields and gardens refused to bloom, hiding its gift of beauty, the world would be poorer and less lovely than it is. If but one of the myriad stars in the heavens refused to shine, keeping its beam of light locked in its breast, the nights will be a little darker than they are. And every human life that fails to hear its message, or fails to speak it out, keeping it hidden in the silence of the heart, leaves this earth poorer. But every life, even the lowliest, that learns of God and then speaks out its message, adds something to the world's blessing and beauty.

“There ’s never a rose in all the world  
     But makes some green spray sweeter;  
 There ’s never a wind in all the sky  
     But makes some bird-wing fleeter;  
 There ’s never a star but gives to heaven  
     Some silver radiance tender;  
 And never a rosy cloud but helps  
     To crown the sunset splendour;  
 No robin but may thrill some heart,  
     His dawn-light gladness voicing.  
 God gives us all some small, sweet way  
     To set the world rejoicing.”

Live near to God that He may speak to you out of His own heart the word He would have you tell again to others. Then be sure you speak it out. “What I tell you in darkness,” said the Master, “that speak ye in the light; and what ye

hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house-tops." "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."

Again, we ought to let the gladness of our heart utter itself. I say the gladness. There is something very strange in the tendency which seems so common in human lives to hide the gladness and tell out the misery. If you will, for one week, keep an account of what the people you meet say to you, even in their shortest greetings, I think you will find that a large proportion of them will not say anything that is cheerful and happy, but much that is dreary and disheartening. They will speak of the discouragements in their business, the hardships in their occupation, the troubles in their various duties, and all the manifold miseries, real and imagined, that have fallen to their lot. But they will have very little to say of their prosperities, their health, their mercies, favours, blessings.

Yet it is of this latter class of experiences that the world ought to hear the most. In the first place, we do not have half so many woes as some of us imagine we have. We have a hundred mercies to one misery. God makes this world just a little rough for most of us to keep us from settling down in it as a final home of perfect content. But He does not want us to complain forever about the roughness. That is neither loyal nor brave, and it is not beautiful. We have no right to add to the world's shadows and burdens by unloading our worries and frets into every ear

we find open. There is no text that says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord tell everybody all their troubles, vexations, frets, anxieties." It would be a far sweeter service to the world if we were to speak only of our gladness, remembering the loving-kindness of the Lord, telling of the pleasant things of our life, and not uttering our woes. There is always a bright side. There is always something beautiful in the most painful or repulsive condition or circumstances; would it not be better for us to find that and speak of it, keeping silent as to the painful or repulsive features?

Again, there is a large field of opportunities for saying so when the words will do great good to others. This is true especially of the expression of kindly feelings, the utterance of encouragements, comforts, inspirations. Many of us are altogether too chary of such words. We have the good thought in our heart, but we do not say it. Some people boast of their honesty in saying what they think. That is very well so long as they think only nobly, charitably, generously, lovingly. But saying what one thinks means oftentimes speaking rashly, impulsively, cruelly, in the flashes of anger and bad temper, and then the words are not wise nor good. "As well say them as think them," some one replies. No, thinking harsh or unkind things hurts you, but does not yet hurt others. A moment later you will repent, too, of the bitter

thoughts, and if they have not been spoken you will be most thankful that they were not.

One told of being very angry after enduring a bitter wrong, and then of writing a letter to the person who had done the wrong, into which all the anger was poured. The words were like fire. A good angel whispered, however, "Do not send the letter till morning." And it was never sent, and the friend has never ceased to thank God it was not. It was all a terrible misunderstanding, and the two are the best of friends again. The redeemed of the Lord should not speak harsh, uncharitable, hurtful words, which will only give needless pain, break hearts, sunder friendships, and which can never be unsaid.

But we should speak out our good thoughts and feelings on every occasion. Some people fail to do this. Some seem to have the impression that the utterance of kindly words, however well deserved, is a sort of weak and unworthy flattery. But it is not, if the words be sincere and true. Thackeray says, "Never lose a chance of saying a kind word." Then he tells of an English lord who always carried his pocket full of acorns, and whenever he saw a bare or vacant place in his estate, he would plant one. Whenever we see a person whose life is sad, or who is discouraged, we should drop a pleasant, loving word into his heart. It will grow into beauty. "An acorn costs nothing, but it may sprout into a prodigious bit

of timber." Kind words cost nothing, but they may mean a great deal in the way of blessing and good.

"If any little word of mine  
     May make a life the brighter;  
 If any little song of mine  
     May make a heart the lighter;  
 God help me speak the little word,  
     And take my bit of singing  
 And drop it in some lowly vale,  
     To set the echoes ringing."

Your neighbour is in sorrow. The shutters are bowed for days as a loved one hovers between life and death, and then the crape on the door tells that death has conquered, and that the home is darkened. You want to help. Your heart is full of sympathy. But you do nothing; you say no word to give comfort. Is there no way by which your brotherly love might make your neighbour's burden a little lighter or his heart a little stronger? You want to help him. Why not say so?

Here is one whose life is full of care. His business is not prosperous. There is sickness in his family. Many things appear to go against him. He battles on bravely, but the fight is hard, the load is heavy, the road is rough and steep. He has to meet it all alone, too, without that human sympathy which would mean so much to him. You stand by and see all this. Ofttimes your heart aches as you notice the man's wear-

ness, the discouragement in his sad face and bowing form. You speak to other neighbours, with sincere feeling about his hard struggle and his defeated look. Yes, yes; but you never say anything to him to show him that you sympathize with him. Why do you not? A few loving, brotherly words might make him strong to press on yet to victoriousness.

It is in our homes, perhaps, that the lesson is needed most. There is a great deal of love there that never finds expression. We keep sad silences oftentimes with those we love the best, even when their hearts are crying for words. A husband loves his wife and would give his life for her, but there are days and days when he never tells her so, nor reveals the sweet truth by any sign or token. The wife loves her husband with deep affection, but she has fallen into the habit of making no demonstration, saying nothing about her love, and going on through the daily home experiences almost as if there were no love in her heart. No wonder husbands and wives drift apart in such homes. There are parents who make the same mistake with their children. A young man, referring to his home life, said: "I never knew the better class of women when I was a boy. My mother was a brilliant, busy person; we never were intimate, and my home was a mere boarding-house to me."

It is to the expression of the love in our hearts that we are called to-day. "Let the redeemed

of the Lord say so." It is to the good things we leave undone, our sins of omission, that we owe attention, quite as much as to the wrong things we do, our sins of commission. Mrs. Sangster writes:

It isn't the thing you do, dear,  
 It's the thing you leave undone,  
 Which gives you a bit of heartache  
 At the setting of the sun.  
 The tender word forgotten,  
 The letter you did not write,  
 The flower you might have sent,—  
 Are your haunting ghosts to-night.

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." We must say it, too, before it is too late. Some people wait till the need is past and then come up with tardy kindness. When the neighbour is well again, they call to say how sorry they are he has been sick. The time for showing friendship is in the friend's need or adversity, and not when the need is passed. There are many who say their first truly generous things of others when the others lie in the coffin. Then they bring flowers, although they never gave a flower when their friends were alive.

"Over the coffin, pitiful, we stand,  
 And place a rose within the helpless hand,  
 That yesterday, mayhap, we would not see,  
 When it was meekly offered. On the heart  
 That often ached for an approving word,



We lay forget-me-nots,—we turn away,  
And find the world is colder for the loss  
Of this so faulty and so loving one.  
Think of that moment, ye who reckon close  
With love—so much for every gentle thought;  
The moment when love's richest gifts are naught;  
When a pale flower, upon a pulseless breast,  
Like your regret exhales its sweets in vain."

Tell out your gratitude—God desires it.  
Speak your message, the world needs it. Pour out  
your love—hearts are breaking for it. "Let the  
redeemed of the Lord say so."

## PSALM CX

### THE DEW OF THY YOUTH

THY people *shall* be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.—Verse 3.

THE “day of thy power” means the day of thine array,—the time when the king’s hosts are set in order for battle. It seems to be a picture of the Church of Christ, a great company of redeemed ones, with the Master at their head. The second part of the verse represents these soldier-priests as young, in the bloom of early manhood, having the dew of youth. [The thought is not that all Christians are young, for all ages are among the followers of Christ, but that all Christians have the gift of unaging youth, immortal life. Note some of the characteristics of Christ’s young warriors as they appear in this vision.

The first thing is that they are in Christ’s army willingly. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thine array.” Another rendering is, “Thy people are free-will offerings.” They have enlisted voluntarily. In the days of Deborah it is said the people “willingly offered themselves.” They were not compelled to enter the army. We belong to Christ because He is our rightful King,

because He redeemed us. Then we must make ourselves His by personal consecration. We must become His willingly. It must be glad, spontaneous service we give to Him.

The second thing to note is the dress of these soldier-priests. They are clad "in the beauties of holiness," in holy attire. Their garments are clean and white. Those who follow Christ should be clothed in the beauties of holiness.

The third thing is the symbol of the dew. "Thou hast the dew of thy youth." It is a glorious thing to be young. Youth is strong. Its energies are unwasted. Its eye is undimmed. Its veins are full of rich, healthy life. It is not scarred by battles. It is not weakened and broken by defeats. Its strength is unimpaired.

Youth is pure—not sinless, but unstained. Its innocence is unsullied. Its hands have not been blackened with deeds of evil. Its garments have not been soiled. Heaven yet lies about the pure young life.

Youth is full of hope. It has no past, but before it stretches a vista, bright with radiant visions—things to be attained, achievements to be accomplished, victories to be won. Call youth's hopes daydreams—air castles, vision-fabrics, if you will; still they are realities to the heart of the young. They are the stirrings of immortality. Blessed is the heart of youth that is filled with these hopes.

Youth has great possibilities. Do you ever sit

down and think seriously about your life—what it is, what wondrous powers are sleeping in your brain, your heart, your hand; what you may make of your life even here, then what you may become in the endless years of your after-life?

Christian young life, young life given to Christ, touched by His hand and set apart for Him—who can paint its glory, its power, its possibilities? The church is a company of youth. In a sense, all Christians are young. The immortal life in them never ages. The growing old of the body is only temporary—the real life within is always young.

In the Psalm the vast company of Christ's youthful followers are compared to the dew. The emblem is suggestive.

Dew is beautiful. When you are in the country in the summer, you may behold a glorious sight every morning. In field and meadow and garden, every leaf, every grass blade, every flower is covered with dewdrops. There are millions of them, each one brilliant as a diamond. They shine like diamonds amid earth's dull things. Every young Christian owes it to his Master to wear the beauties of holiness.

Dew is pure. It is never stained like the water that lies in gutters and wayside puddles. It is not filled with sand and other particles, like the water that runs in brooks and streams. Dew is distilled from the air and is perfectly pure. Young Christians should be pure and holy in their

lives. In this world none are perfectly pure. There never was but one life without stain or trace of sin. Yet the crystal dewdrops glistening on leaf or blade of grass, or hiding in the bosom of a rose, are emblems of what every young Christian should strive to be. "Pure religion and undefiled before God" is what the Bible paints as our ideal. To keep ourselves "unspotted from the world" is set down as the ideal of every Christian life. "Blessed are the pure in heart," is the Master's beatitude for purity. The man of pure heart shall see God.

There is a legend that in heaven at twilight a great bell of marvelous sweetness softly swings, rung by angel hands, and that a man may listen and hear on earth the wonderful music, if he puts from his heart's inner chamber all the passion, pain, and strife, and all the heartaches and weary longings of his soul, if he thrusts out all hatred, bitterness, and envy, and all wicked thoughts and unholy feelings, this wondrous music may be heard by him. It is only a legend, but it enshrines a truth. The pure in heart shall see God; if we keep our inner life free from unholy thoughts and desires, we shall indeed hear the music of heaven's evening bells.

A writer tells of going with a party down into a coal mine. On the side of the gangway grew a plant that was perfectly white. There in the midst of black flying coal dust it remained spotless and clean—white as snow. A miner, accom-

panying the party, took a handful of the black dust and threw it upon the plant, but not a particle adhered. On the white folds of the plant there was a wonderful enamel to which nothing defiling would cling.

Such should be the life of every young Christian in this evil world,—unspotted and holy. Do you ask, “How is this possible?” God can keep you. If God can make a little plant so that no dust can stain its whiteness, can He not by His grace so enwrap your life in the beauties of holiness that no defilement of sin can soil your purity? If He can keep a flower stainless amid clouds of floating dust, can He not keep your heart in like purity in a sinful world?

Dewdrops are wonderful mirrors. In their crystal clearness you may see reflected the whole blue sky that arches above you. Every young Christian life should show to all who look upon it a reflection of the glory of Christ. The world’s people cannot see Christ in His spiritual revealings; it is your mission as Christians to show Christ mirrored in your own life. The likeness will be faulty and fragmentary, but the features should be there in unmistakable beauty.

The wife of Sir Bartle Frere went to meet her husband at a railway station, on his return home from a long absence. She had with her a new servant who had never seen his master. “Go and look for Sir Bartle,” bade the lady. “But how shall I know him?” asked the servant.

“Oh,” said Lady Frere, “look for a tall gentleman, helping somebody.” The servant found a tall man assisting an old lady out of the railway carriage, and from the description knew him at once. One mark of Christlikeness is love ministering, always helping somebody. Let this mind be in you.

Dew is refreshing. This is especially so in Eastern countries. There it seldom rains, but the dews are heavy, and the crystal drops creep down into the bosom of the flowers and to the roots of the grass blades, and all the beauty of field and forest and garden is revived.

Drooping plants are fresh again and fading flowers are lovely as ever.

Here, again, the dew is a beautiful emblem of young Christian lives wearing the beauties of holiness. They carry cheer, joy, and brightness, wherever they go. They take into their own homes, when they gather back at the close of day, a quiet yet persuasive and resistless life which touches all within with a new gladness. The home which has in it one or more happy young people has in itself a happy secret of joy and blessing. The influence of their lives is full of power for good.

Young people do not know how much they can do to brighten the world just by being sweet and beautiful—with love, quietness, and peace in their hearts, with gentleness, goodness, and helpfulness in all their lives. It is a great thing to have a

refreshing influence upon lives that one touches. Many people are discouraged, weary, or overwrought in life's paths, or find it hard to keep up under their burdens; it is a great thing for you to be a comfort and a strength to such lives. Seek to be filled with God, and then go out to be joy-bearers, hope-inspirers, comfort-bearers, wherever you may go.

In the way in which the dew brings its blessings, there is also a suggestion of the manner in which young Christian people should seek to do good. It comes in the night, while men sleep. It comes without noise. No ear hears it fall. It steals down noiselessly and does its beautiful work of refreshing; then, the moment daylight comes and the sun's bright glare touches the earth, it vanishes. It loses itself, too, in doing good, for it sinks away into the heart of the rose, down among the roots of the grasses. It writes no record. It scars its name nowhere to make sure of recognition and praise. Nothing shows that it has been at work save the new life in all nature.

All this is suggestive of the way we should do our work for Christ. No grace shines more brightly in a Christian life than humility. Like the dew, seek to do your work noiselessly. Do not try to draw attention to yourself. Blow no trumpet in the streets when you are going out to do some work for your Master. Let not your right hand know what your left hand doeth. Let



your influence pour out like the fragrance of a flower, like the light of a star. Hide away from the world's glare. Do not try to score your name on every bit of work you do. No matter about the praise—God knows. Work for Christ's eye, not for man's. Pour out your richest love, your costliest service, your most precious gifts, to bless those who need blessing, and let all be lost in the lives you seek to help—caring not for recognition or reward, but only that your ministry may do good. Like a dewdrop, that finds a drooping rose and sinks down into its folds and loses itself, but revives the fainting flower, so be content to do good, to bless the life that needs your benediction, and be only remembered by what you have done.

“Where did yesterday's sunset go  
When it faded down the hills so slow,  
And the gold grew dim and the purple light  
Like an army with banners passed from sight?  
Will its flush go into the goldenrod,  
Its thrill to the purple aster's nod,  
Its crimson fleck the maple bough,  
And the autumn glory begin from now?”

“Deeper than flower-fields sank the glow  
Of the silent pageant passing slow.  
It flushed all night in many a dream,  
It thrilled in the folding hush of a prayer,  
It glided into a poet's song,  
It is setting still in a picture rare;

It is changed by the miracle none can see  
To the shifting lights of a symphony;  
And in resurrections of faith and hope  
The glory died on the shining slope,  
For it left its light on the hills and seas  
That rim a thousand memories."

Not a dewdrop that sinks into a flower is lost.  
Not a word or a holy influence hides away in vain  
in any heart. Live and speak and work and be  
for God and bless the world, and care not for  
reward.

Another way in which the dew is an emblem of  
the true young Christian life is in its origin. It  
comes out of the sky. It is not born of earth's  
springs, but from the "womb of the morning,"  
from the bright, clear heavens. So the Christian  
life is not of earth. It is not merely natural. It  
is not something learned in schools. A Christian  
is one born of God, born of the Spirit, born from  
above. The spiritual life you have in your heart  
came down out of the skies from Christ. God  
says, "I will be as the dew to Israel." Grace is  
simply God's own Spirit coming down and touch-  
ing our lives, resting upon them as a holy bap-  
tism, entering into them as the dew enters the  
grasses and flowers.

It is a beautiful thought that God Himself, and  
not any mere blessing from God, is the dew that  
enriches our lives and becomes beauty and bright-  
ness in us. We have but to open our heart to  
receive divine grace. The dew rests upon the

flowers, not in the heat of noon-day, but when in the darkness and the silence they grow quiet and cool. It is not in struggle and restless striving that we get the blessing of God's renewal, but in the stillness and coolness of humility and peace.

“Receive Him as the dew into thy heart,  
O thirsty one, who long His grace hath sought.  
Dew forms in stillness; struggle not, nor strive;  
What thou dost need to learn is to *receive*.  
The air surrounding thee is full of God,  
With love and life and blessing for thee stored.  
Get cool and quiet, and the dew will fall—  
A little at a time, not once for all.”

You can be dew to others only as God is dew to you. You can give only what you have received. You must live near the heart of Christ if you would be a blessing in this world. You must keep your heart open to receive into it the life of God that is ever flowing close about you. If only you keep thus filled with the Holy Spirit you will be fitted for being a blessing to every life you touch.

## PSALM CXVIII

### THE REJECTED STONE

THE stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. 23 This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.—Verses 22, 23.

THERE is a strange Jewish story or tradition of a stone that was originally meant for an important place in the building, but was misunderstood and rejected. It is said that when Solomon's temple was building, all the stones were brought from the quarry, cut and shaped ready for the place they were to fill. Among the stones was a very curious one which seemed of no desirable shape. There appeared to be no place where it belonged. They tried it in one wall, but it would not fit there. They tried it in another wall, but it was not suitable for that. The builders were vexed and angry, and threw the stone aside among the rubbish.

The temple was years in building, and this castaway block became covered with moss, and the grass grew around it. People passing by laughed at the stone of such peculiar shape that it would fit nowhere in the temple. Every other stone that came from the quarry found its place and fitted into it perfectly, but this one seemed useless—

there must have been a blunder in the architect's drawings.

Years passed and the temple rose in silence into beauty, but still the poor stone lay unused, unwanted, despised. The great day came when the temple was to be finished, and throngs were present to witness the crowning event. There was excitement—something was wanting. "Where is the capstone?" the builders said. Nowhere could it be found. The ceremony waited while the workmen sought for the missing block. At last some one said, "Perhaps the stone the builders threw aside among the rubbish is the one for this place of highest honour. They brought it and hoisted it to the top of the temple, and lo! it fitted perfectly. It had been cut and hewn for this very place. Loud shouts rent the air as the stone which the builders had refused as unfit became the headstone of the corner, filled the place of highest honour.

The stone had been misunderstood. The master-architect knew the place for which it was hewn and shaped. But the builders did not understand it and thought the architect had blundered. At length, however, the architect was vindicated, and the stone, long despised, found its place of honour.

There seems to be a reference to this tradition in the words of the Psalm: "The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner." Several times the reference occurs in the Scriptures. In the story of the building, it

was the architect's plan or purpose that was misunderstood. The builder thought the master had made a mistake, but he had not. The stone was despised for a time, but at length found its place, the place of honour. Continually the same mistake is made in life. People think that God has blundered in His plans. But when we come to understand, we find that His purposes are right.

“The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.” We see examples and illustrations of this continually. There are men who at first do not seem to fit into any place among men. They do not appear to have ability for anything worth while, to possess the qualities which will make them of value to the world. They are not brilliant or strong, nor do they seem likely to do anything to distinguish themselves, yet, later, they develop ability, wisdom, even greatness, and fill important places in the world. There are many eminent men for whom their early teachers predicted failure. They were dullards, not showing capacity. Yet afterwards, when they found themselves and found their place, they became distinguished in some particular line. Parents and teachers should never be discouraged when children seem unpromising. There may be hidden in their brain and heart special gifts, possibilities of power which will be brought out in certain circumstances, fitting them for particular duties.

No other man has ever been a more remarkable illustration of this than Lincoln. Reading only the narrative of his early years, no one would dream that he would fill a great place in human history. Even in his manhood, when he was beginning to disclose his powers, men did not think of him as fitted to be President of the nation, the leader of a great moral movement. He was not the stone the builders would have chosen as the head of the corner. He was ungainly, unattractive. Never was the hand of Providence more clearly visible in the bringing of any man to his place than in the events which led to Mr. Lincoln's election to the Presidency. The political leaders did not want him. He was the stone which the builders rejected.

Yet we know also the story of his wonderful life and work. His greatness was not fully known even while he lived. Every year since his martyrdom has revealed new elements of noble character in him and shown in clearer light the greatness of his work. The world thinks of Lincoln as the emancipator of slaves. He was that, but he was also the saviour of his country. South as well as North knows now how he loved the Union. His greatness appears at every point. His oration at Gettysburg contains only a few sentences, less than three hundred words, but it is acknowledged everywhere to be a piece of matchless eloquence.

From whatever side we look at this man he is

great. More and more, too, as the years pass, do we see the providential meaning of his life, what it meant to his own country, what it meant to Christianity, what it meant to the world. His tragic death did not end his life nor put an end to his work. They buried him amid the tears of a nation, but his life was not hid in the grave.

“You could not bury him, although you slid  
Upon his clay the Cheops pyramid,  
Or heaped it with the Rocky Mountain chain.”

Thus Lincoln is an example of one who was misunderstood by men, a stone which the builders rejected, but which God made to be the head of the corner.

God knows what He is doing when He is making men. He never makes one He has no place for. Even if it is a broken life, God has a place for it, something for it to do. There is a home where the only child is idiotic. Has God a place for it? Yes—perhaps it will be the means of the preparation of the parents for sweeter life and higher glory.

We see examples of the same truth in life's common relations. There are many who are misunderstood and unappreciated, and who do not get their proper meed of praise and commendation. It is so in some homes. A good many of us men do not half understand the worth of our wives, the fineness of their spirits, their devotion



to our interests, nor appreciate their self-denials and self-sacrifices for us and our homes. We are not half thoughtful enough toward them, not gentle enough. It is not enough for a man to be true to his wife, to provide well for her, to supply her with physical comforts—her heart craves appreciation, cheer.

“So many gods, so many creeds,  
So many paths that wind and wind,  
While the simple art of being kind  
Is all this sad world needs.”

A great many people everywhere—men as well as women—are not well understood. They may be tactless. They may have faults which mar their beauty. They may have peculiarities which neutralize some of their good qualities. They are uncouth and unattractive in some way. People do not see the good there is in them, do not set the true value upon them, misunderstand them. Here is a man whom many of his neighbours do not like. Something in his manners offends them, excites in them unkindly feelings toward him. They say he is not sincere, that he does not mean what he says. Yet those who have had an opportunity to know this man's inner life learn that his neighbours are mistaken in their judgment concerning him. He has in him good qualities, he fills an important niche. He is only misunderstood. Let us pray to see people as God sees them, for He always perceives the best in every

one of us. He sees our possibilities, not what we are to-day, but what we may become through love and patience and discipline. Some fruits are not sweet till late fall. Some people ripen slowly and it is a long time before they become sweet, beautiful, and helpful. Do not reject any life because it is not beautiful. Let God train it, and some day it may fill an important place. The stone which you builders would reject as unfit, God may want by and by for the finest ornament in His temple.

Let us be more patient with people we do not like, whose faults offend us, who seem unfit for anything worthy or noble. Perhaps their faults are only unripeness. Or perhaps they are not faults at all, only individualities which will be elements of strength when the persons find their places. God has a plan for every man and a work for every one to do. Let us leave people with faults and peculiarities in God's hands. He will have a place by and by for the misunderstood life, and the stone which the builders despised He will use to be the head of the corner somewhere.

Sometimes it is God Himself that is misunderstood. Yesterday a young woman came to ask counsel. A few years since she was married to a noble young man and went to the West. Her husband died and soon all the money he had gathered was embezzled by a professed friend, leaving the young widow with two little children,

penniless. Other losses and sorrows have come. The woman has returned to her childhood home to take up her life work. She is brave and cheerful. She is not doubting God, but she is questioning, "Is God always good? Does God really never cease to be kind? How can I thus understand these years of my life in which every flower of joy and hope has faded, and everything I had has been taken from me?" She is in danger of misunderstanding God. What can one say to her?

Only this, that God's work with her is not yet finished. You read a story, and at the end of a certain chapter all seems wrong. If the book ended there, you might feel that God was not kind. But there are other chapters, and as you read on you learn how good came out of all that seemed hard, even unjust.

Many times we think our experiences in life anything but beautiful and kindly. We cannot see divine love in them. It does not seem to us possible that these rough and hard things can be built into the temple of our lives as stones of beauty. This may be the very stone which God has prepared for the holiest place in all the building, and that some day you will say of it, "The stone which I, the builder, would have rejected, has become the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in my eyes."

This illustration of the misunderstood stone runs through the whole New Testament. It is used by our Lord in the Gospels as applying to

Himself. He was the stone which the builders rejected, but which God made to be the head of the corner. Speaking to the rulers, He said: "Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes!"

The meaning is very clear. Jesus Himself was the stone which the builders had rejected. The rulers had a mistaken idea of the Messiah who was promised. They believed the Messiah was coming, but they thought He would be a great earthly king who would free them from their subject condition and would make them a great nation that should conquer the whole world. They had not learned the sacrificial character of the Messiah given in such prophecies as the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. So when Jesus came, lowly, meek, loving, unresisting, they did not believe He was the Messiah promised. They misunderstood Him.

Peter in his defence before the Sanhedrin used the same illustration. The rulers demanded by what power the lame man at the Beautiful Gate had been made whole, and Peter answered, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even in him doth this man stand here before you whole." Then he added, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you build-

ers, which is become the head of the corner." That is, the rulers had rejected Jesus of Nazareth, the stone God had provided, but God had taken the misunderstood and rejected stone, and made it the very keystone of the temple. The great building of Christianity rests on this stone, Christ the one foundation.

Yet there are some people who do not like Jesus Christ. They do not approve of His way of helping and saving. They do not think He is the friend they need. They do not approve of the life to which He invites men. They do not think He can lead them to the best things, the fairest beauty of character, the deepest joy, the largest usefulness.

But the temple could not be completed without the misunderstood and rejected stone. This stone at once made it complete. Your life will always be incomplete, unfinished, until Christ is received to His supreme place. Christ loves you. Accept His love and let it fill your heart. Christ came to give you life, fullness, abundance of life. Let His life enter your soul and possess you wholly. Christ came to give you rest of soul amid all strifes and cares. Take the rest He gives. Christ came to give you His own peace. Let His peace rule in you. Christ wants to take charge of all your affairs, to choose your way for you, to direct all your life. Lay all the tangles, all the frets, all the questions in His hands. Christ came to change you into His own likeness by teaching you

the lesson of love, by giving you self-control, self-mastery. He does not want to destroy the temper, the appetite, the tendency in you which troubles you so much. He wants to teach you to be master of it, master of yourself, of all your being, and lead all your life into sweet devotion to Him. Christ wants to enter into your life so fully that He will be your constant companion, that He and you shall live together, so that you will do nothing without Him, but that He and you will work together and do impossible things. Christ came to lead you thus into the fullest, richest, most blessed life of fellowship and service, giving us His joy, His peace, His life, His love, at last crowning you with glory.

That is what it means for the misunderstood stone to be made the head of the corner for you. The most glorious thing possible is to have Christ in His rightful place in our lives.

## PSALM CXXI

### LOOKING UNTO THE MOUNTAINS

**I WILL lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. 2 My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.—Verses 1, 2.**

“I WILL lift up mine eyes.” We ought to train ourselves to look up. We grow in the direction in which our eyes turn. We become like that on which we look much and intently. We were made to look up. Man’s upright form indicates this. The Greek word for man means upward-looking. An old writer says, “God gave to man a face directed upward and bade him look at the heavens, and raise his uplifted countenance toward the stars.”

Yet there are those who never look upward at all. They never see anything but things that are on the earth. They never see the stars. They never look toward God. They do not pray. They have no place in their scheme of life for God. Christ taught that all the circumstances of our lives are in the care of God who is our Father, whose very children we are. The hairs of our head are all numbered. Even the birds are fed and the flowers are clothed by our Father. We should continually look up to God. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains.”

The poet did not mean that the mountains themselves were a shelter for him. Nothing earthly is a sufficient refuge for an immortal being. To him the mountains were a shadow of eternal things. Mountains have always appealed strangely and powerfully to noble minds. When the writer says he will lift up his eyes unto the mountains he is thinking of God. "From whence shall my help come?" he asks, and the answer is, "My help cometh from the Lord."

Think a little what mountains mean to the world. Many blessings come down from them to the plains. Ruskin mentions three great offices which the mountains fulfill. They determine the courses and the channels of the rivers. They are the great ventilators of the earth, generating currents of air that bear health on their bosoms. Then they keep the valleys fertile by the soil they perpetually send down.

The mountains make the valleys. Not so many years ago the land in certain western plains was desert. The soil was rich, but there was no water, and nothing would grow. Yet yonder, on the mountain sides, were streams flowing away from the melting snows. All that was needed was to bring the blessing of the mountains down, and the deserts would then be made to blossom as the rose. Men lifted up their eyes to the mountains, and to-day we have the orange groves and the gardens and all the marvelous luxuriance of Southern California.



This is a parable of spiritual life. From the mountains of God flow down heaven's streams of grace, and the bare and empty lives they touch become rich in beauty and fruitfulness. Think what they miss who never lift up their eyes to the mountains of prayer, who get nothing from God.

This wonderful little Psalm describes the manner of God's helping in a most striking way. Our keeper is the strong One, who made heaven and earth. The power that keeps you, that shelters you, that blesses you, is the power of omnipotence. "The Lord is thy keeper." Note some points. The guardianship is individual—"thy keeper." You say, "Surely God does not think of me. He has such vast concerns in His hands that one life so small as mine cannot have personal thought and care." The answer is, "The Lord is thy keeper." You are as really and as much the object of His interest as if in all the universe He had only you to think of. When, in distress or need, you lift up your eyes unto the mountains, and ask, "Whence shall my help come?" God turns to you as if He had nothing else to do but attend to your cry.

Think, too, of the minuteness of His care. "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved." On the mountain paths great disasters may result from the slipping of a foot. Many a life has been lost by a misstep among the crags. But the divine keeping extends even to the feet. "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord."

There is here another assurance of exquisite beauty. "He that keepeth thee will not slumber." No human love can watch unintermittingly. The most devoted mother must fall asleep sometimes beside her suffering child. But there is an Eye that never closes, that always watches.

"The Lord will keep thee from all evil." How do we account, then, for the troubles, the sufferings, the sorrows that befall good people? The poet does not say the Lord will keep you from pain, loss, sickness, and injury, from people's unkindness, from calamity—but from "evil." These are not "evils." There is only one evil—sin. You may suffer all manner of trials, but so long as you have not sinned no harm has come to you; you have been kept from all evil. Thus this whole Psalm shows the safety of those who lift up their eyes unto the mountains. They are guarded when they go out and when they come in. You never can get away from God's keeping, if you live in the mountains. The mountain takes the storms and shelters the valleys. A tourist tells of coming upon a village which nestled at the foot of a great mountain. He asked the villagers if they had many storms there. "Yes," they replied, "if there is a storm anywhere in the whole region, it seems to find us." "How do you account for this?" asked the tourist. The answer was: "Those who seem to understand say it is because our mountain towers highest of all the mountains. If he sees a cloud anywhere in the horizon, he

beckons to it and it comes and settles on his brow." The tourist asked further if they had many accidents from lightning. "None," was the answer. "We have seen the lightning strike the mountain countless times, but no one in the village is ever touched by it. We have the thunder, which shakes our homes, and then we have the rains, which fill our gardens with the beauty which everyone so much admires, but the lightning never touches us. The mountain takes all the bolts and shelters us."

This, too, is a parable of what Christ is to us and to all who believe on Him. He is the mountain on which the storms break. On Calvary the tempests of ages burst upon His head. But all who nestle in His love are sheltered in Him. "In me," He said, "ye shall have peace." He is our eternal keeper, because He took the storms on His own breast that we might hide in quiet safety under the shadow of His love. We lift up our eyes unto the mountains and rest in peace and confidence because our help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

A mountain is the symbol of reality. The weakness of much Christian faith is the unreality of its beliefs. God is real. Helen Hunt Jackson tells of a plain, simple man who lived beside the sea. He was always talking about purple mountains that he saw. He would point to them. But his neighbours saw no mountains, and laughed at him and said he was a dreamer. One day he

sailed away to find his mountains and came back laden with treasures. Men laugh at you when you talk about your mountains of faith. They say you are a dreamer. But to you they are gloriously real. You go to them in your prayers and come back with your hands full of heavenly blessings.

Is your religious life real to you? Is Christ real? A little while ago a young Christian friend wrote: "I read my New Testament a great deal, but somehow I find myself asking all the while, 'Are these things actually true? They certainly are very beautiful to read about, but are they true? How do we know they are true?'" Are the things you read in the New Testament real to you? Is God real to you as your Friend? Two girls walking together one evening were engaged in earnest conversation. They stopped a moment before separating and a gentleman waiting for a car overheard just a fragment of their conversation. One of them said to the other, "Yes, but why has nobody ever seen God?" That was all the gentleman heard, but the one sentence told of pain and question in a heart that longed for certainty. "Why has no one ever seen God?"

There are many good people who have the same longing. A disciple said once to the Master, "Lord, show us the Father." He had been revealing the Father, not only in his miracles, but in all his sweet and gentle life, in his patience, his compassion, his kindness, his helpfulness. There was

more of divine glory in any one common day of Christ's beautiful life of love than there was in a whole year of Sinai's majesty.

"Why seek ye for Jehovah  
   'Mid Sinai's awful smoke?  
 The burning bush now shelters  
   A sparrow's humble folk;  
 The curve of God's sweet heaven  
   Is the curve of the leaf of oak;  
 The voice that stilled the tempest  
   To the little children spoke—  
 The bread of life eternal  
   Is the bread He blessed and broke."

There is mystery everywhere. There really are few things you understand. How can you lift your hand? How can you see the far-off mountains from the crags about us here? How can we talk by wireless telegraphy with a friend on a ship half across the ocean? You cannot see Christ, and you ask how you can know He loves you. But you cannot see the love in the heart of your friend. Do you doubt it because you cannot see it? You cannot see any form when you are praying, and you ask, "Is there really anyone who hears? Is there really anyone who sees me, knows me, loves me? Is there One who cares?"

If there were no assertions of God's being and no assurances of His love and care in the Bible, daily Providence is so full of God that we could

not doubt His existence, or His thought for His children. Christ is to us the most real Friend in all the world, though we never see Him with our eyes. We never think of doubting Him or asking if He is real. No human friend comes so close. We see Him in His interest, His care, His kindness, in people's lives, all about us.

Some years since two men met on a vessel crossing the sea. They soon discovered that they had both been in the American Civil War, one with the North, the other with the South. They found, too, that they had taken part in the same battle. Then this incident came out as they talked together reminiscently. One night the Northern soldier was on picket duty on one side of a little river, and the Southern soldier was a sharpshooter just across the stream, picking off soldiers on the other side. The picket was singing softly, "Jesus, Lover of my soul," as he paced his beat, and the words of the old hymn were heard in the stillness over the river. The sharpshooter was taking aim and was about to fire upon the picket as the song revealed his place. Just then he heard the words, "Cover my defenceless head with the shadow of Thy wings." His rifle dropped—he dared not shoot a man praying that prayer. "I could as soon have shot my mother," he said.

Was not God in this strange incident? Was not the answering of the soldier's prayer a reality? We need not ask why no one ever sees God? Lift up your eyes unto the mountains in every time of need, and you will see Him in the

help, the blessing, the deliverance, the comfort, the grace that will come to you.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.” Let us make our lives lives of upward looking. There are people who look down always, watching for thorns. They never see anything but the unpleasant things. They are always finding troubles. They find them on the brightest days, in the loveliest places, when their circumstances are the happiest. But that is not the way to go through life. Lift up your eyes and look for roses, not for thorns. Some people think the world is all bad, all wrong, with no love, no friends. They do not love anybody, nor trust anybody. They hear only discord—no music. They say all men are liars. They tell you all Christians are hypocrites, all merchants dishonest, all homes bedlams, all marriages failures, that nobody is pure, that there is no unselfishness.

Can you think of any other way of making one's life wretched, miserable, and unhappy that equals this? Lift up your eyes unto the mountains where the air is sweet, the light clear, the music like angels' songs. This will change all the world for you. Of course there are discordant notes in the music of almost any neighbourhood, but there are also beautiful harmonies, sweet symphonies, noble oratorios, and why should we listen only to the few discords and shut our ears to the inspiring songs that fill the air? Let us hear the sweet songs, not the discords.

Lift up your eyes unto the mountains when

you think of your own circumstances. They may not seem bright or hopeful. Perhaps you have discouragements, difficulties, hardships. But why should you keep your eyes on these? There is always more white than black, more joy than sorrow, more love than hate, more encouragement than discouragement. Lift up your eyes when things are hard with you, and you will always find something to cheer you. Look for the one joyous, hopeful thing and let that make you brave. There is always something good in your circumstances. Find that. There is a story of a little dog lying on a parlor floor one chill and dreary day. Presently there came a small patch of sunshine on the floor, a ray of sunlight coming in through the shutter. The dog saw it with his dozing eyes, got up and went and lay down in it. That was good philosophy. If there is only one spot of cheer or encouragement in your circumstances, find it and set your chair down in it.

So the Psalm calls us with a thousand voices to look up and to come up higher. Think of the love, the sweetness, the holiness, the truth, the serenity, the joy of God. If we would reach these excellences, these lofty things, we must lift up our eyes and our hearts unto the mountains. We never can attain them by looking down. Goodness is always found above us, not in the depths below us—it keeps ever above us. We must look to the mountains. The heights call us. Let us leave the lowlands of selfishness, covetous-



ness, resentment, envy, and all that is unworthy, and go up and live with Jesus Christ on the mountains of holiness, of victory, of purity.

The mountains are places of strength. They are the emblems of perpetuity. We talk about the everlasting mountains. The higher our lives reach as they become filled with God, the stronger they are, the securer and safer. The power of temptation over them grows less and less. Our faults and vices, the mean things, the groveling things, cannot live in the pure mountain air,—they will choke and die there. The heights are refuges for our souls. Enemies of spiritual life are everywhere, but they cannot reach us if we climb up into the mountains. I saw the statement that some one, looking through a great telescope, detected birds flying five or six miles above the earth. How safe they are up there so high! No arrow can find them there. The soul that looks up into the mountains, that lives in the heights far above the earth, no fowler can trap it, no enemy can touch it. The mountains are places of safety.

The mountains are places of peace. There is a point in the heavens, above the clouds, where no storm ever blows, where no tempest ever breaks, where nothing ever disturbs the perfect stillness. The mountains bring peace. With God we are above all fear. Let us rise above the strifes and confusions of earth into the peace of God.

## PSALM CXXII

### JOY IN GOD'S HOUSE

I WAS glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. 2 Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.—Verses 1, 2.

THE title of this Psalm is suggestive. It is called a Song of Ascents. Whatever the origin of the title may have been, it is pleasant to think of a true life as a series of ascents. We are always going upward if we are walking with God—out of sin and debasement toward holiness and brightness, out of the mists and shadows that lie in the valleys to the sunlight that streams on the mountain tops. It is uphill all the way. We think as we climb some rugged steep, and come at last to its crest, that we shall have no more such paths; but to-morrow find that we have only reached the top of one of the foothills, and that there are other hills—a stairway of them—leading up at last to the mountain summit, which we call heaven. If, therefore, we are living truly, our course is a continuous ascent, and our songs should be songs of ascents.

“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.” We can readily understand the gladness of the ancient Hebrews as

they were summoned to the house of the Lord. They were dispersed over many countries. Their annual feast days were occasions of great joy for them because they were then called to the holy city, the place of the temple, the most sacred spot in all the world to Hebrew hearts. No wonder they went up singing. They were going back to their old homeland. They would there meet friends they had not met for a long while. They would sing again the old songs and worship God in the old way. It should always make us glad to be called to the house of the Lord. We go to church for two general reasons. One is, to worship God. He has been good to us, and we are called to return to Him love and worship. Another reason is, that in His house God meets us with blessings—grace, strength, comfort, wisdom, light. We go to church not so much to give God something—our offerings of homage and praise, as to get something from Him, help for the journey, comfort for our sorrow, strength for our weakness. We should love to go to God's house because we need the help we cannot find elsewhere.

“Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.” When at last, after the long journey, the pilgrim reached the gate of the holy city, his joy was unbounded. Perhaps he had come from afar, his heart full all the way of eager anticipation. Now he is climbing the last hill, now he is at the gate, now entering, now inside. What gladness is his! Like joy should be the true Chris-

tian's when he enters the presence of God. We get so used to the exercise of prayer, the privilege of communion, the blessedness of meeting God, that sometimes we fail to experience the rapture our heart should find. The angels, as they look upon the worship of earth's pilgrims, must wonder at its lack of warmth and fervour, its tameness, its stateliness. If we would come into God's presence only now and then, a few times in the year, as the Jews came to their temple, how hungry would we be for God, and what gladness the approach would give! Or if we could have a glimpse of the realities amid which we stand when we enter the presence of God, no words could express our gladness.

“Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord.” Two reasons are here given why the people went up to God's house regularly. One was, as a testimony. Thus they showed to the world their love for God and testified of their own faithfulness and devotion. When their neighbours saw them wending their way to the temple they knew that they were devout Israelites. Constant church-going is always a good witness for God. When every Lord's day we drop our business, our worldly tasks, and turn away from ease and self-indulgence, and go to God's house, we are honouring God before our neighbours. The man who is seen going to the

church every Sunday, though he never says a word in public about religion, is preaching a sermon to the indifferent—a sermon more eloquent and impressive than he could preach in words.

Another reason for church attendance is to give thanks unto the Lord. After a week of gifts and favours received we should go to the house of God and take there our offerings of praise. Yet is there really much thanksgiving in the worship of the average Christian congregation? We try to make our services very solemn. We should be reverent, for we are in the presence of the mighty God. But joy should be the keynote in all our worship, for we have always a thousand reasons for thanksgiving. Yet do we always give thanks? One man said in a meeting that he had been living at Grumble Corner for a long time, but had now moved up to Thanksgiving Street. He said that he found the air sweeter and purer, and everything brighter and better. Too many of us live in Grumble Row most of our life. We do little but complain. Even our prayers are made up of fears, anxieties, and requests, with scarcely a word of praise. If the angels can hear the prayers put up by most Christians, they must wonder how they can be so sad all the time. We should go to God's house to give thanks.

“For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.” The city of Jerusalem was the capital of the country. It was not only the place for worship, but also the place

where the people came for their laws. It was the place to which they came with their inequities and injustices, their questions requiring settlement. All this Christ is to us in our Christian life. The church is the divine refuge for us. That is the place, therefore, to bring all our wrongs. If others have injured us, sinned against us, done us harm, we may bring the matters to God's house, sure that justice will be done, that our wrongs will be righted, and that evil shall be transmuted into good for us.

This is a great teaching, and one which we should not fail to learn. Many of us allow ourselves to be sadly hurt in the fiber of our life by the treatment we receive from others. We allow slights, injuries, unkindnesses, to be like thorns in our flesh, wounding us. Some of us grow bitter and resentful, trying to settle every injury for ourselves. This is not the Christian way. Rather we should take all such wrongs to God's house, for there are set the thrones of judgment. This is what Christ Himself did. "When he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee." Again and again, in the closing verses of this Psalm, comes the prayer

for peace. Peace is the sum of all spiritual blessing. Another part of our errand to God's house is to pray for peace on the church and for the prosperity of all who love God. We should never go to church for ourselves alone. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray always for others, mingling intercession with our supplication. It is not "My Father," but "Our Father," to whom we should come. We should pray for our brethren and companions. We should seek the good of the whole Church of Christ.

If the spirit of these verses were the spirit of all our worship, there would be no strife in our churches, no divisions, no quarrels. Peace is the absence of all bitterness. The secret of peace lies in willingness to obliterate self, to suffer uncomplainingly, rather than to demand our "rights." Church quarrels come from the opposite spirit—some one is determined to have things his own way, even if the consequence is the breaking up of the church. If we say the words of this Psalm sincerely we must be willing to be broken and crushed, to have our rights set aside, if only the Church of Christ prospers and is at peace.

## PSALM CXXXVII

### OUR DEBT TO THE CHURCH

**IF I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget *her cunning*.  
6 If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof  
of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.—  
Verses 5, 6.**

**THIS is a Psalm of the exile. We see the captives weeping by the streams of Babylon. Despair was in their hearts. They had been carried away from the land they loved. So sad were they that they could not sing. They hung their harps upon the willows. They could not touch them in the bitterness of their sorrow. Their captors bade them sing to them one of the songs of Zion. "But," they asked, "how shall we sing the song of the Lord in the land of the stranger?" The picture is one of great sadness.**

**Then, right into the midst of this elegy break the strains of fond remembrance of Jerusalem: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." Jerusalem was in ruins; the holy house had been laid waste; and the captives in the land of their exile grew homesick at every thought of the loved**



place. The intense language shows an unconquerable love of country in the hearts of the Hebrew patriots. More than that, it shows a deep, holy love of the church, for country and church were one with them. Love for the church has always been a mark of true piety. As zeal for the church wanes, devotion wanes. A congregation of people who ardently love their church and cleave to it with unfaltering affection, will always be a godly people.

What do we owe to the church? The church has preserved the holy word for us through the ages. It has passed down to us the sacred ordinances, with the broken bread and the holy cup, the memorials of the Saviour's love. It has given to us also a line of godly ancestors. Your mother knelt at its shrine. Your father bowed at its altar. It prepared thus a little Garden of Eden for you in this world of storms and sorrows before you were born. It linked you in a godly succession. It set your feet in a pathway of blessing. Then its fragrant breath kissed your cheeks the moment you began to live. It drew down wings of love over your cradle. It wove a safe ark of prayer and faith for your infancy. It put upon your brow in baptism its holy chrism. It taught your lips with their first lisplings to speak the sacred words, "Our Father which art in heaven." It filled your child heart with heavenly teachings. It trained your earliest steps to walk in the ways of right and truth. It has

been your good angel all the years, guiding, teaching, protecting, ministering.

The church led you to Christ to find salvation; you would never have known of the Saviour if there had been no church. Then, think of all it has been to you along the years. You have found your way to the sanctuary Sabbath after Sabbath, burdened oftentimes with the week's cares, struggles, toils, and failures, and God has sent help to you. You have come with heavy heart and have gone away with a song. You have come perplexed, distracted, anxious, and have left with peace in your soul, the tangles smoothed out, the clouds swept from your sky. You have come discouraged, and have gone away rejoicing in hope.

Words fail to express our obligation to the church. Its Sabbaths are golden links in the dull iron chain of our days. Its communions are like transfiguration hours, when heaven comes down and touches our life's dark mountain tops. Its hours of prayer are bright spots, with ladders of sunbeams, down which blessed angels come bearing benedictions, joys, mercies, and up which they ascend, carrying our tears, our cries for help, our penitences. When suffering or sorrow shuts us away from the sanctuary, the church does not forsake us. It is Bethel wherever we are. It bends over us in the sick room, breathing its divine promises, its words of cheer and courage. When death enters our home and touches with withering hand the form of loved one, leaving a vacant

chair, the church comes, sings its songs of faith in the ears of the sorrowing, and speaks its words of comfort. On the coffin it lays its flowers, telling us that they are not dead who sleep in Jesus. By the grave it pronounces its glorious liturgy of resurrection-hope.

Wherever we turn, we see blessings that the church has brought to us. Contrast England and America with China, India, Africa, and what makes the difference? The church. Look at our literature. What gave you your Tennyson, your Longfellow, your Whittier, your Brownings? The church. Look at art. What inspired Raphael, Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Fra Angelico, and other great artists whose immortal works are the admiration of the world, the influence of which floats over all Christian lands as a tender benediction? The Church of Christ. What gave us our schools, with their kindly nurture of the children? What gave us our homes, with their sweet love? What gives us marriage, with its hallowed blessings? What gave us our Christian civilization, with its privileges, its liberties, its comforts, its securities, its refinements, its amenities? The church. What gave us our hospitals, our orphanages, our asylums, our refuges for all classes of suffering and helpless ones? The church.

In view of all this, what is our duty to the church? Should we not love it? Should we not be ready to serve it? Should not our language be like that of the Hebrew exiles, as they turned

their faces toward Jerusalem and spoke of their loyalty? Should we not say with sincere heart, "If I forget thee, O church of Jesus Christ, let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I remember thee not; if I prefer not thee above my chief joy"?

Krummacher has a pleasant legend of Zaccheus, the little man, who found Jesus by climbing up into a sycamore tree that grew by the way-side. Krummacher says that in his old age Zaccheus still lived at Jericho, humble and pious before God and man. Every morning at sunrise the old man would go out to the fields for a walk. After these walks he always came back with a quiet, happy mind, to begin his work for the day. His wife noticed his unvarying habit and curiously wondered where Zaccheus went so early and what he did. One morning she secretly followed him, and he went straight to that sacred tree, from amid whose branches he had first seen Jesus. She hid herself among the bushes and watched to see what he would do. First, he took a pitcher of water which he poured upon the roots of the old tree, which were getting dry in the sultry heat. Then he pulled up some weeds that were growing here and there under the tree. Then, as she watched further, she saw him pass his hand fondly and lovingly over the tree's trunk. After this, he stood and looked up at the branches where he had sat that day when Jesus called him, and

then, with a patient, grateful smile upon his face, he returned to the city and to his own home.

His wife afterwards referred to what she had seen, and asked him why he did not send a servant to take care of the tree which he seemed to love so well. The good man was hurt, and answered: "You have not done well to follow me and watch me, and to search out my doings and feelings, which you cannot share. But, my beloved, let me be alone in my care of this tree. It was it which brought me to Him whom my soul loveth."

The church has been far more to us than this old tree was to Zaccheus. It not only brought us first to Christ, but ever since that hour it has been the hand of Christ to us, blessing us and encircling us. Therefore, we should do for the church what Zaccheus did for his tree. We should love it. We should water its roots. We should gather away the weeds we find growing under its shade. We should nourish it in every possible way. Everyone who has received spiritual blessings through the church should be ready to give of his temporal good things for the use of the church. It is part of the law of Christian life that we must give. To give is to live. Not to give is to die. To save our life is to lose it. To lose our life for Christ's sake is to save it. Still water stagnates; only the flowing streams keep sweet and wholesome. The man who receives but does not give, misses the greater blessing of which

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

One of the most suggestive incidents in the gospel story is that one which shows us Jesus sitting over against the treasury and beholding how the people cast in their money. He is always beholding how we give—how much and how. Giving is, therefore, a part of our religious life. The way we use our money, little or much, tests our character. Jesus read the inner secret of the widow's soul in her giving. She gave more than the rich men because she gave all, and because she gave in love. So it ever is—the widow's farthing is more than the rich man's million. But ever Christ is sitting over opposite us while we give, watching the collection plates as they are passed, and He blesses us when we give aright. St. Paul tells us that the love of money is the root of all evil—there is no sin nor crime to which it has not tempted men. But if we learn to use money as God wants us to use it, there is no blessing nor good of which it may not become a root.

Another suggestive incident is one in The Acts, when, after the day of Pentecost, the hearts and purses of the newly baptized believers were opened. We remember how the money was poured out at the apostles' feet. They had all things common. The rich sold their lands and the money was used to meet the needs of the poor. A revival always makes men more liberal. When the

Holy Spirit works mightily in the church, gifts are poured out.

Then there is another side. Giving brings revival. One of the most remarkable promises in the Bible is in Malachi. God is calling His people to return to Him. "Return unto me, and I will return unto you." Then He tells them that they have been robbing Him. How? By withholding the tithes and offerings which were due to Him. Hear this solemn word, "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me." Then listen to the gracious promise: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." One of the ways to bring a blessing down upon us and upon our church is for us to bring all the tithes into God's storehouse.

Some one says, "I cannot afford to give." The poorest cannot afford not to give. We should give as we have—no man with hundreds can expect a blessing for giving two mites, but the poor widow's two mites—all she had—God receives with commendation. Bring in the whole tithe, and God will open heaven's windows. No revival for an illiberal church. Great reviving for a liberal church. The relation between money and blessing is very close.

Another duty we owe to our church is cheer-

ful loyalty. This is a wide duty. It includes attendance at all the services, unless providentially hindered. It includes joyous participation in all the worship and all the work. It seems hard to get church members to realize that every one of them has a part in all this which no other one can take. There is a story of a conductor leading a great orchestra in a musical festival, who stopped the performance, crying out, "Flageolet!" The flageolet was not doing its part, and the conductor's trained ear missed its one note. God misses the one silent voice in the congregational music, the song of the one heart that is hushed while all are praising. We want enthusiasm in worship, and in work. Whatever we do we should all do and do heartily.

There is a tremendous power, too, in encouragement. There is a word in Isaiah, describing ideal life and work: "They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, 'Be of good courage.' So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smiteth the anvil, saying of the soldering, 'It is good.'" Everyone knows the value of encouragement in his own life. It makes us strong and brave to have some one say a cheerful word to us. And how heavy it makes our heart, when we are doing our best, perhaps fighting against odds, to have some one come along and say something disheartening!

It is the duty of all to be encouragers, one of



another. This is no time for croaking, or for saying dismal, disheartening words, or for prophesying evil things. Let no one be a hinderer of God's work by making it harder for Christ to maintain His cause and kingdom here. Let one help the other. Let everyone say to his brother, "Be of good courage." Let the carpenter encourage the goldsmith, and the plumber cheer the painter, and the grocer hearten the dry-goods man. Do not give me your doubts and fears—I have enough of my own, and you only make it harder for me to live. Give me your faiths and hopes and all inspiring things. Cheerful loyalty, faith in God, confidence in Jesus Christ, hope—these are the words which tell us what our duty is to our church.

There is another duty—work for the church. There seems to be an impression among many Christians that the work of the church must be done by a few members—the pastor, the officers, the Sunday-school teachers, and heads of organizations. There is a word in one of our Lord's parables which says, "To every man his work." There is not a man, woman, or child in any church who has not a share of the responsibility for the success of the church. No one should be a hinderer; but it is not enough not to pull down. One of the bitterest curses in the Bible is this: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord . . .

against the mighty." This is a curse on not doing, on sitting still. The Lord wants every one of us at his post. Seven full days of kindness every week every Christian should get into his life. One day in seven for rest, but seven days in seven for doing good.

There should be a helping by prayer. Every member should pray daily and earnestly for his church, for his fellow members. Without prayer no blessing will come even on the best work. There is too little praying. We depend too much upon work without the divine blessing. There is a story of a church in which for fourteen years there had been a revival every winter. One winter the revival did not come. The church had met to talk about it—why the blessing had not been received. At length one of the members arose and made a confession. "I have long been in the habit of praying every Saturday night till midnight for the descent of the Holy Spirit. Now, brethren"—and he began to weep—"I confess I have neglected it this year." That was why the blessing had not come. That man's prayers had brought the blessing those fourteen years, and his restraining of prayer had left heaven's windows unopened. Not to pray earnestly for revival is to be a hinderer. May God enable every one of us to help by prayer. One person not praying for his church may be the cause of the failure of blessing.

## PSALM CXXXIX

### GOD'S THINKING OF US

How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! 18 *If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.—Verses 17, 18.*

WE like to know that people think about us. Even a postal card coming in the mail some morning from a friend far away, saying only, "I am thinking of you," brings you a strange uplift. You were sick for a time and could not see your friends, and one day a rose was sent up to your room with a card and a message of love. How it cheered you! Some one was thinking of you. You were in sorrow, and a little note came in with just a verse of Scripture, a word of sympathy, or a "God bless you!" and a name. It was almost as if an angel from heaven had visited you. Somebody was thinking of you. You have not forgotten how it helped you. "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" This means God's thoughts of us. They are precious. In one of the previous verses of the Psalm the poet tells us that God knows all our thoughts. Here he tells us of God's own thoughts—He thinks of us, thinks of us with love. The root of the word

rendered "precious" is weighty. God's thoughts are weighty, like gold. Then they are without number—that is, God does not think of us merely once in a lifetime, or now and then, but continually.

"How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand." God thinks about us. "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" The Bible teaches unmistakably that God cares for us. A scientific writer not long ago declared that the greatest discovery of the twentieth century would be the discovery of God, and that then will it be known that God does not care. It would be terrible if this should prove to be true. If God never thinks about you, if you have no place in His heart, this would be a dark world for you. But we do not need to wait for a new discovery of God in this twentieth century. The discovery has been already made, and God does care. His name is Father. Can one be a father and not care for his child? Jesus came to reveal God to us, and He tells us over and over that God loves us, thinks about us, provides for us, hears our prayers.

Not only are we in God's thoughts, but He thinks about us as individuals, not merely as a race. The teaching of the whole Bible is that God knows us one by one. There was only one sheep that had strayed from the fold, but the shepherd missed the one, thought about it, and sought it over the hills. The Psalms abound in

expressions like these: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." "He leadeth me." "I sought the Lord and he answered me." "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." Then this: "When I awake, I am still with thee." No matter where you awake you will find God bending over you. This is the drift of the whole Bible. It is not God and the human family, not God and a nation, but God and the individual. The Good Shepherd calleth His own sheep by name. The Father never forgets one of His own children. Though you are cast on a bare rock in the sea, and no friend in the world knows where you are, you are in God's thought. He is watching and caring. Though you are carrying to-day some secret grief or trouble, of which no one on earth can know, He knows. He sympathizes. He is thinking of you.

In one of the earlier verses of our Psalm the poet says to God, "Thou understandest my thought afar off." Your most secret thoughts are known in heaven. Jesus is touched even with the feeling of our infirmities. In all your afflictions He is afflicted. It is just the same as if there were only one person in the world and you were the one. He is thinking of you to-day as if He had only you to think of in all the world.

"How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" Could anything be more precious, more comforting, more strengthening, more uplifting, than to know that God really cares, that whatever

your need or trouble, He is thinking about you? If you actually believe this, all your trouble will be light, and life's meaning will all be changed for you. One writes:

If I could only surely know  
That all the things that tire me so  
Were noticed by my Lord—  
The grief that wastes my very life,  
The pang that cuts me like a knife,  
The lesser pains of daily strife—  
What peace it would afford!

I wonder if He really shares  
In all these little human cares,  
This mighty King of kings;  
If He who guides through boundless space  
Each blazing planet in its place  
Can have the condescending grace  
To mind these petty things.

It seems to me, if sure of this,  
Blent with each ill would come such bliss  
That I might covet pain,  
And deem whatever brought to me  
The loving thought of Deity  
And sense of Christ's sweet sympathy,  
Not loss, but richest gain.

Dear Lord, my heart shall no more doubt  
That Thou dost compass me about  
With sympathy divine:  
The love for me once crucified  
Is not the love to leave my side,  
But waiteth ever to divide  
Each smallest care of mine.

Providence is full of illustrations of God's special thought for His children. In an address made in Glasgow before an Insurance and Actuarial Society, on "The Incalculable Elements of Business," James Byers Black told the story of the escape of the one man who survived the Tay Bridge disaster, some years since. This man left the train when it stopped for a moment at Fort Street station, just before it started on its journey to death. His hat blew off and he followed his impulse to run after it. At that instant the train moved off and the man was left standing alone at the little wayside station, on a dark and tempestuous night. Within a very few minutes the train had crashed through the broken bridge and had carried seventy-four persons—everyone on board—down to death in the remorseless waters of the Tay. The man whose hat blew off was the sole survivor of that night's tragedy.

It would be interesting to know this man's subsequent history. Why was he spared? What work was there for him to do? If we could understand the mystery of Divine Providence, no doubt we should learn the reason why God thought of this man and kept him off the ill-fated train. We call this a special providence. Some one once asked George Macdonald if he believed in special providences. He said, "Yes,—in the providences, but not in the special." He believed that we were always meeting providences. Not now and then, in some remarkable instances, but

in every event and occurrence there is a Divine Providence. God is always on the field. Our life is full of God. We do not usually see His hand, but He is never absent. There are no accidents, no chances, in life. God thinks of us continually and watches over all our movements. We call it a providence when there is a disaster on the railway and we are not hurt. Is it any less a providence when the train runs through with no disaster, and we are uninjured? One man asked thanks to be given in a meeting because his horse stumbled on the edge of the precipice and he escaped being dashed to death. Another man asked to be included in the thanksgiving because he passed on the same road and his horse did not even stumble. Not only does God deliver us in danger, but He guards from danger. Every man is immortal till his work is done. "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God." I am glad I do not have to plan and direct my own life. God thinketh upon me.

God's thoughts for our life may not always be our thoughts, but they are always the right and the best thoughts. There is a word in Isaiah which I always read with deep reverence. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." It is God's thought we want for our life, rather than our own thought. Of course,



God's thought for us is higher than ours; that is, wiser, better, safer, than ours. He is infinite in knowledge and sees the end from the beginning. We will all assent to this as a truth, and also as a theory of life. But when we come to the acceptance of God's thought, His way, His plan, instead of our own, sometimes we fail. We think we could plan better than God has planned. We are not willing to accept His thought for our life. What just now would you make different if you were directing your life? You would leave out some disappointments, perhaps. You would not have this year's pinching times, if you were changing things to your own mind. But would it be better that way? Perhaps the best things in your whole life have come out of the things you would omit if you were planning.

When we say, "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" we should be ready to accept these thoughts, to believe in them, to yield ourselves to them. Have you ever thought what a glorious thing it is to have God's plan for your life, to know that He thought about you before you were made, and then made you according to His thought? It is a wonderful truth. No wonder that George Macdonald said he would rather be the being God made him to be than the most glorious creature he could think of. No possible human plan for your life could be half so high, so noble, so beautiful, as God's thought for you.

This is true, not only for the plan of our life

in general, but of each detail of it. We are coming all the while to certain experiences which so break into our thought for our life that we are startled and say, "Surely this cannot be God's thought for me." Sometimes we have pleaded with God to withhold from us something,—some sorrow, some loss, some pain,—which seemed to be impending, and we did not get our request. That which impended came on in spite of our prayers. What really happened? God's perfect thought for our life at that point went on instead of our lower thought. And that was best. Our desire should always be that God's thought shall be realized and not ours. This should be our prayer in the most intense moments of our life.

One tells of an unanswered prayer. There had been the most passionate pleading for something without which it seemed that the friend's life would be most incomplete. It appeared that it would be nothing less than disaster to have the request not granted. But if it was God's thought for the life, it would have been no disaster. The disaster, then, would have been the granting of the request. "My ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." When will we learn this?

" 'Twas long ago,  
When I was young. Alas! I did not know  
A better way. I said, 'It must be so,  
Or God cannot be good.'

Alas! alas! my poor weak human pride!  
How differently would I have quickly cried  
If I had understood.

“And now I have  
A thankful heart for that unanswered prayer,  
And so I think it will be when, up there,  
Where all is known,  
We look upon the things we longed for so,  
And see how little they were worth, and know  
How soon they were outgrown.”

God's thoughts for us are always good, always right. Jeremiah, in comforting the exiles in captivity, said: “Thus saith Jehovah, After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith Jehovah, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you hope in the days to come.” God's thought for His people in the captivity was peace, good, blessing. When you are passing through some great sorrow, some overwhelming loss, some sore trial, God's thought for you always is peace, good, blessing. It seems to me that if we would only believe this, if we would only be sure of it, whatever the experiences may be, nothing ever could disturb us. Of course, we cannot understand things, and we cannot see how good can be in our Father's thought for us, when all seems so destructive, so ruinous. But here is the divine

word for it, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith Jehovah, thoughts of peace and not of evil." Then we have the experience of the past. Has it not been always so? God never had a thought toward any child of His that was not a thought of peace.

He always means good, even in the most painful trials. The cross of Christ was a thought of God, and you know what infinite blessing the cross gave to the world. Every disappointment of yours is a thought of love, if you understood it.

"Whate'er events betide,  
Thy will they all perform;  
Safe in Thy breast my head I hide,  
Nor fear the coming storm.

"Let good or ill befall,  
It must be good for me;  
Secure of having Thee in all,  
Of having all in Thee."

## PSALM CXXXIX

### LOOKING ONE'S SOUL IN THE FACE

**SEARCH** me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: 24 And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.—Verses 23, 24.

It takes courage to pray this prayer, "Search me, O God!" Not all men can do it. Many people fear to look into their own heart. If by some divine flash we were made to see ourselves as we are—all the evil that is in us, our face would blanch into deathly paleness. It takes courage to ask God to search one's inner life and show one one's sins.

It takes honesty, too, to pray this prayer. The poet meant that every wrong thing found in his heart, under the calcium light of God's Spirit, he would cast out. Some people do not want to find their own sins, because they do not want to give them up. They do not wish to discover their secret faults, because they love them and desire to keep them. We cannot pray this prayer if we are not ready and willing and eager to have Christ save us from whatever evil way, whatever sinful habit, feeling, disposition, or temper we may discover in ourselves. It takes honesty, therefore, and sincerity, to pray God to search us.

The writer asks God to search him. He does not say he will search himself. An ancient maxim was, "Know thyself." But no man can really know himself, in the depths of his being, unless God holds the lamp to shine in the darkness. God is light. Christ is the world's only light. None but God can truly search us and show us to ourselves. The poet invites divine searching.

Neither does he ask his neighbours to search his ways and thoughts. Men are willing enough, oftentimes, to judge their fellow men, to find and expose their faults, to proclaim their sins. It is easier to confess other people's sins than one's own. The Pharisee was quite free in searching the publican and declaring his wrongdoings, though he saw no faults and sins in himself. The poet might have found men who would be willing to search him and try him and point out his blemishes and his wicked ways. But this he did not ask. Men's judgments are imperfect. Sometimes they are uncharitable, even unjust. There are lives that go down under men's condemnation, whom love would have saved. At the best, men are only ignorant or partial judges. They cannot see our motives, and oftentimes they condemn as evil that which is noble and beautiful, and approve as right and praiseworthy that which before God is unworthy and sinful. It is not enough for us to ask men to search us and try us, to say to a friend, "Tell me of my faults and blemishes, that I may put them away."

Dr. Stalker tells the story of a young composer whose work was being performed in a great music hall. A throng was listening and applauding. But the young man seemed to be indifferent to all these tokens of approval. All the while his eye was fixed on one man who sat at the center of the hall. This was his old master, and the musician cared more for his opinion than for that of the thousands of other listeners; and was thrilled more by his faintest look or gesture of approval than by all the thunderous cheers of the throng.

It matters very little to us what men may say either in praise or in blame of our conduct, or our deeds. But there is One who sits at the center of all things, who is perfect in wisdom, love, and righteousness, and whose judgments are unerring. We should want always to know what He thinks of our acts, words, dispositions, and thoughts. Though all the world applauds what we do, if on His face there is no pleasure, if we see there the shadow of disapprobation, what a mockery is men's applause! On the other hand, if the world sneers, condemns, and blames; if men have for us only scorn, reproach, and persecution; and if, meanwhile, turning our eyes toward the heavenly throne, we see in the divine face the smile of pleasure and approval, what need we care for either the favours or the fagots of men? It is to God we should turn for the searching of our lives. No other judgment will avail.

It is better and safer always to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. God is kindlier and juster than men. Nobody understands you as God does. Nobody knows your infirmities and has such patience with them as God has. He knoweth our frame. He remembereth that we are dust. He understands our weakness. He knows human life—this blessed Lord of ours—by actual human experience. He knows all the elements that enter into human struggle, and, therefore, is fitted for sympathy. We never need be afraid to open our heart to Him, for He will never be unjust with us. We never need be afraid to ask Him to search us, for if we truly want to give up our sins when we discover them we shall find Him most merciful and gracious.

It will be worth our while to think seriously of the things in us that only God can see. There are sins which were hidden from ourselves, of which our conscience is aware, our unwitting, inconsiderate errors, the evil in us which lies too deep to be discovered. There is a self in us which even we ourselves do not see. There are depths of our being into which our own eyes cannot pierce. Even our own knowledge of ourselves is not final. You may say that you know of no sins, errors, or faults in yourself, and you may be sincere; still this is not evidence that you are sinless. In one of his epistles St. Paul says, "I know nothing against myself." He was not living in the practice of any sin, so far as he knew.



He did no wrong thing willingly and wittingly. He cherished no secret sin. Every fault he discovered he put away. He knew nothing against himself. But he added, "Yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord." The bar of conscience in our own breast is not the final court. It is not enough to have the approval of our own heart. There are errors and evils in the holiest life on earth which only God's eye can detect. We must ask God to search us, if we would be made absolutely clean. God knows all our past. We do not. There is much that we have forgotten. The memory of many of our deeds has faded out. But God has forgotten nothing. Forgetting our sins does not blot them out. The evil things we do not remember are there yet.

We cannot see our own faults, even as our neighbours can see them. There is wisdom in the wish that we might see ourselves as others see us, for it would from many a blunder free us and foolish notion. We are prejudiced in our own favour. We are disposed to be charitable toward our own shortcomings. We make all sorts of allowance for our own faults. We are wonderfully patient with our own weaknesses. We are blind to our own blemishes. We look at our own good qualities through magnifying glasses, and at our faults and errors with lenses reversed—making them appear very small. We see only the best of ourselves. So true is that, that if we were to

meet ourselves on the street some morning, the self God sees, even the self our neighbour sees, we would probably not recognize it as really ourself.

We remember the little story Nathan told David about a rich man's meanness toward a poor man, and how David's anger flamed up. "This man must die," cried the king. He did not recognize himself in the man he so despised, till Nathan quietly said, "It's you." We are all much alike. If the veritable story of your life were written in a book, in the form of a story, and you were to read the chapters over, you probably would not identify the story as your own. We do not know our real self. We do not imagine there is so much about us that is morally ugly and unseemly, that is positively wicked. But God searches the innermost things of our life.

God sees into the future and knows whither the subtle tendencies of our life are leading us. We do many things which to our own eyes appear innocent and harmless, but which have in them a hidden evil tendency which some day will come to ripeness. We indulge ourselves in many things which may not appear sinful, but which leave on our soul a touch of blight, a soiling of purity. We permit ourselves to grow into a hundred little habits in which we see no danger, but which meanwhile are weaving their fine gossamer threads into a net for our souls, or twisting their invisible filaments into a rope which some day will bind us hand and foot. We spare ourselves

little self-denials, thinking there is no reason why we should make them, not aware that we are neglecting God-given duties, and refusing to take up crosses laid at our feet by the Master, thus failing in complete faithfulness. We form friendships which become very dear to us, but which insidiously harm us, weakening our life's purpose or drawing us away from God.

The peril in all these things lies not so much in the mere acts or indulgences of the hour as in the things to which they will lead. We have no eyes to see the hidden danger in these "no harms" in our life, but God detects the peril, and sees what the end will be. A popular writer tells the story of a dream which a man had. He had left his English home and was in India. He had done many things which would have pained his mother's heart if she had known of them. One night he dreamed that he saw a drunken man enter his room. As the moonlight fell on the man's face, making every feature visible, a terror more terrible than mortal had ever known before seized upon the dreamer. He saw that the face was his own, but marked and scarred with the furrows of disease and much evil-doing—white, drawn, and grown old. It was a glimpse of what he was coming to, if he did not quickly change his wrong course.

There is another kind of hidden faults. There are things in many of us, no doubt, which we regard among our strong points, certainly fair and

commendable traits or qualities, which in God's eye are sore blemishes. Good and evil in certain qualities lie not far apart. It is easy for devotion to principle—a good thing—to take the form of obstinacy—a very unlovely thing. It is not hard for zeal for orthodoxy to pass into intolerance and bigotry. Self-respect, consciousness of ability, easily degenerate into hateful self-conceit. Gentleness readily becomes weakness. A man may be giving his life, in the larger sense, to the work of Christ, doing great things for the church, while in his own home, with those nearest to him, he is an unregenerated heathen. We see this kind of fault cropping out in our neighbour's character and life, and we say, "What a pity so fine a character is so marred!" Yes, and our neighbour looks at us, and says, "What a pity that with so many excellences, he has these blemishes and faults!" Sin is deceitful.

The substance of all this is, that besides the evil which others see in us, and which we see in ourselves, all of us have undiscovered errors and faults which only God can see.

We ought never to shrink from learning our faults. He is a coward who does. Moreover, he is making a fearful mistake who is willing to let a fault remain undiscovered in his life. He is refusing to see a danger which by and by may work his ruin. Every true man should be glad always to learn of any hidden fault he has. Ruskin says, "Count yourself richer that day you dis-

cover a new fault in yourself—not richer because it is there, but richer because it is no longer a hidden fault; and if you have not found all your faults, pray to have them revealed to you, even if the revelation must come in a way that hurts your pride.” Secret, undiscovered faults are more perilous than discovered faults. Open sins are enemies in the field, undisguised, recognized as enemies. Hidden faults are enemies concealed, traitors in our camp, passing for friends. No good, true, and brave man will permit a discovered sin or fault to stay in his life. He will fight it to the death. But his undiscovered sin or fault lurks and nests in his heart while he knows it not, and breeds its evil in his very soul. Before he is aware of its presence it may eat out the very heart of his life and poison the springs of his being.

A fire broke out in a large storage building in the morning, but it had been smouldering all night, and, undiscovered, eating its way among the bales, so that when discovered the whole interior was a mass of fire, and there was only the shell of the building left. So hidden faults destroy lives, and none but God knows the destruction that is going on until the fatal ruin is wrought. We ought to pray God continually to search us and save us from undiscovered sins. Hidden faults in us will hinder our spiritual growth. They also make us unmeet for God’s work. When Canova, the sculptor, was about to begin his statue of Napoleon, his

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keen eye saw a tiny red line running through the upper part of the splendid block of marble out of which he was to hew the statue. The stone had been brought at great expense from Paros. Common eyes saw no flaw in the stone, but the sculptor saw it, and the stone was rejected.

May it not be so oftentimes with lives which face great opportunities? God's eye detects in them some undiscovered flaw, or fault, some tiny line of marring colour. He desires truth in the inward parts. The life must be pure and white throughout. He who cherishes a secret sin is balking God's purpose in himself. God cannot use him for the noble task or service for which He meant to use him. Because of the secret sin he is rejected.

Are we ready to make the prayer for divine searching? Are we willing to have God search us and find every secret, hidden sin in us? Are we willing for Him to go down into our heart, among our thoughts and affections and desires, and find and reveal to us every way of wickedness He discovers? Then are we willing to give up, tear out, and cast away forever from us everything that God finds that is not holy?

“Lord, many times I am aweary quite  
Of my own self, my sin and vanity;  
Yet be not Thou, or I am lost outright,  
Weary of me,

And hate against myself I often bear,  
And enter with myself in fierce debate;  
Take Thou my part against myself, not share  
In that just hate.  
Best friends might loathe us, if what things perverse  
We know of our own selves they also knew;  
Lord, Holy One, if Thou who knowest worse,  
Shouldst loathe us, too!"

## PSALM CXLIII

### A MORNING PRAYER

**CAUSE** me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. 9 Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. 10 Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness. 11 Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.—Verses 8-11.

**SOME** people never pray. Others say that prayer cannot do anything for them. It is very pathetic when men thus cut themselves off from God whom they need so deeply.

“Speak to Him thou, for He hears and  
Spirit with spirit can meet—  
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer  
Than hands and feet.”

No day starts well or safely without its morning prayer. We need to get the touch of Christ's hand upon us to give us strength and courage for our day. Many of us have to rise early and hurry away to work that is hard and sometimes frets and irks us. Perhaps we are thrown among people who are not kindly and congenial, who try us and irritate us by their talk and behaviour. The days bring their temptations, their allurements,



their false lights, their burdens, their responsibilities, their struggles, possibly sudden sorrows. To push out into any new day without prayer is perilous. However quiet and sweet the morning air is, we need God to lead us in the quiet and sweetness. If we are going into a day of storm and trouble, we certainly need the divine shelter and guidance.

The morning prayer sets the day apart. We should begin each one with God. It is a great secret of beautiful and faithful living to learn to live by the day. George Klinge says:

God broke our years to hours and days,  
That hour by hour, and day by day,  
Just going on a little way,  
We might be able all along  
To keep quite strong.

One day at a time, and then begin each day at God's feet. In the morning prayer in this Psalm there are six petitions.

"Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning." This is a prayer that the first voice to break upon our ears at the opening of the day shall be the voice of God. Henry Drummond says:

"Five minutes spent in the companionship of Christ every morning,—aye, two minutes, if it is face to face and heart to heart,—will change your whole day, will make every thought and feeling different, will enable you to do things for His

sake that you would not have done for your own sake, or for anyone's sake."

It is very sweet when one is living in constant fellowship with Christ, to look into His face in the first waking moment, to thank Him for His love, to receive His smile of forgiveness and peace, and His benediction for the day. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." After being with God we are ready for anything that the day may bring.

"One hour with Thee, my God, when daylight breaks  
O'er a world Thy guardian care has kept;  
When the fresh soul from soothing slumber wakes  
To praise the love that watched me while I slept;  
When with new strength my blood is bounding free,  
The first, best, sweetest hour I'll give to Thee."

We cannot go out to sing in the morning unless we have first opened our hearts to hear the song of divine love. Fitting is the prayer, "Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness, for in thee do I trust." When we hear God's voice of love in the morning we are ready for anything.

The second petition of this morning prayer is, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk." We cannot know the way ourselves. The path across one little day seems a very short one, but we cannot find it ourselves. Each day is a hidden world to our eyes. We cannot see a single step before us. There is an impenetrable darkness that covers the sunniest day as with

night's sable robes. You know not what the unspent hours of this very day may hold for you. They may have surprises of joy, or they may have surprises of sorrow for you. They may lead you into a garden of pleasure, or a garden of anguish. All you can do is to commit your way to God, praying, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk."

It brings rest and peace to us, as we look out upon a day's hidden paths, not knowing where we ought to go, to remember that God knows all. Job speaks of the mystery of life, when one seeks the way and cannot find it: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

God has many ways of answering this prayer and making us know the way. He puts His word into our hands and says, "Take; read." Another of God's voices speaks within. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord," says the Scripture. We call this candle conscience, and it burns in our breasts as a lamp burns in a room at night. Then, God guides us through human friends. Some one advises young people always to seek to have an older friend to whom they can go for the wisdom learned from experience. Sometimes the way amid the tangles is made plain

through some providence. One door is shut and another is opened. A friend was telling how when he was in much uncertainty about his duty on a certain occasion, when a great task was laid into his hands, and when he prayed to have the way made plain, he was led into a sick room. He did not think of that as the answer to his prayer, but in that place of pain he learned the very lesson he needed to learn, and found the very guidance he sought. When the oriental shepherd led his flock through some dark valley, it was because that was the way to a bit of green pasture on the other side.

Or the answer to your prayer may be a keen disappointment. "O God, this cannot be the way!" you cry. If Joseph, the morning he left home to go to his brothers, had prayed, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk," he might have wondered as he was led to Egypt as a slave, if that were the answer to his prayer. It certainly did not seem as if God were directing him those days. But as the years went on he learned that there had been no mistake in the guidance. If he had escaped from his brothers or from the caravan, he would have only spoiled one of God's thoughts of love for his life. We need never be afraid to pray this prayer and then to accept the answer, whatever it is. God will show us the way if we will accept His guidance.

“I pray,  
But this: Let every day,  
Be modeled still  
By Thine own hand; my will  
Be only Thine, however deep  
I have to bend Thy hand to keep.  
Let me not simply do, but be content,  
Sure that the little crosses each are sent,  
And no mistake can be  
With Thine own hand to choose for me.”

[The third petition in our morning prayer is, “Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me.” The day is full of dangers. We do not know it; we see no danger. We go out not dreaming of any possible peril. Yet anywhere there are enemies. Disease lurks in the air we breathe, hides in the water we drink, and is concealed in the food we eat. Along the street where we walk, on the railway on which we ride, there are perils. No African jungle is so full of wild beasts, savage and blood-thirsty, as are the common days with malign spiritual enemies. We are aware of no danger and, therefore, cannot protect ourselves.

What can we do? As we go out in the morning we can offer this prayer, “Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me.” Thus we can put our frail, imperilled lives each morning into the keeping of the Mighty God.

We have no promise that prayer will take the dangers out of our day. It is not in this way that

God usually helps. Prayer brings God down about us, a heavenly protection, making us safe in the midst of most hurtful things. Not to pray as we go into the day is to venture among life's thousand perils with our heads uncovered, with no panoply about us. The problem of life is not to get an easy, safe way, but to go through the way, though beset with perils, unhurt, to be kept from harm amid sorest dangers.

Every day's experiences have their perils for us, which with prayer become helps and blessings, but without prayer can only harm and devastate our lives. We cannot help ourselves. We cannot compel the dangers to become our shelter. We cannot cover our own souls with any shield that will make us safe. The only safety for us any day is in prayer. If we understood what perils there are for us, if our eyes were opened to give us a glimpse of the enemies that wait for us in cloud or sunshine, we would never dare to go forth from our door any morning until we had first called upon God to deliver us from our enemies. One writes of such a day, a prayerless day:

The sunlight streaming o'er my temple gate  
 With ray beguiling, soft and fair,  
 Made me at dawn neglect until too late  
 To bar it with the wonted prayer.

Two fair-clad robbers, Duty and Delight,  
 Won entrance and engaged my mind,  
 While dark, unnoticed and in rags bedight,  
 Worry and Folly crept behind.

To-night there 's ruin in my holy place,  
Its vessels gone, its treasures spent,—  
Contentment, faith and every hard-won grace  
Displaced and spoiled. Lord, I repent.

We cannot keep ourselves; God alone can keep us. We are safe nowhere but under the shadow of His wings. We should flee to Him to hide us. It is never safe to go forth any morning without a prayer of committal.

The fourth petition of this morning prayer is: "Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness." "Teach me to do thy will." A little before the writer prayed, "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk." But knowing the way is not enough: we must also walk in it. Mary Lyon said she feared nothing so much as that she should not know all her duty and that she should not do it. St. Paul said, "The good which I would, I do not." When we ask God in the morning to show us the way, we must ask Him also to teach us to go in the right path. "Teach me to do thy will. . . . Lead me into the land of uprightness." A great many people know their duty better than they do it. It should be our aim in all things to conform to God's will. But we need God's help to do this. Our hearts are inclined to disobedience. We do not naturally love to walk in "the land of uprightness." We need both to be taught and led. "Teach me . . . Lead me" are the two prayers. We all need to

pray these prayers together. Sometimes the answer does not come in sweet, easy ways, with breath of fragrance and in summer sunshine. Sometimes the teaching comes in sore pain and loss, and the leading is over sharp stones, along a rough, steep path. Still our prayers should be, even amid tears and pain: "Lord, Teach me . . . Lead me." If in no other way we can be saved, it is better that we lose out of our life all the flowers and sunshine, and walk amid thorns and in darkness, reaching home at last, than that we walk in flowery paths and in the brightness, and never get home at all. So each morning let us continue to pray, "Teach me . . . Lead me." "Teach me to do thy will. Lead me in thy ways."

The fifth petition in this morning prayer is, "Quicken me, O Lord." To quicken is to give life. We have no strength for the day's duties and struggles. We feel ourselves weak and faint. Perhaps we are physically unable for the work before us. We certainly are spiritually weak. Our life's fountains need refilling. This is a prayer for life, new life. Christ came that we might have life and might have it in abundance. He is ready to give it to all who will take it. We need but to ask for it. In the morning as we go forth to the day's toils, tasks, cares, and struggles, our prayer should be: "Quicken me, O Lord. Give me life and strength. Put Thy Spirit into my heart. Breathe Thine own breath into my soul. Shed abroad Thy love in me.



Quicken me with strength inwardly. Fill me with Thyself." If we pray such a prayer we shall not fail through weakness. The power of Christ will then rest upon us, and when we are weak then shall we be strong.

The last petition of this morning prayer is, "In thy righteousness bring my soul out of trouble." The day may bring sorrow, or it may bring other trouble. We cannot guide our feet through the dark valley. Sorrow is meant to do us good and will do so, if we have God to lead us through it. One writes: "Gardeners sometimes, when they would bring a rose to richer flowering, deprive it for a season of light and moisture. Silent and dark it stands, dropping one fading leaf after another, and seeming to go practically down to death. But when every leaf is dropped and the plant stands stripped to the uttermost, a new life is even then working in the buds, from which shall spring a tenderer foliage and a brighter wealth of flowers. So, after in celestial gardening, every leaf of earthly joy must drop, before a new and divine bloom visits the soul." Thus it is that sorrow works blessing and good in the child of God when the Holy Spirit guides the life through the experience. But our prayer must always be that God would bring our soul out of sorrow, for otherwise only harm and not good can come from it. Sorrow will wound and scar our life unless the gentle hand of Christ be upon us to heal and comfort.

Then, there are other troubles besides sor-

rows,—business troubles, home troubles, cares, disappointments, difficulties of a thousand kinds. We know not what any day may bring to us. We need God's wisdom, God's power, God's guidance, or we shall never get through unharmed. Let us learn to lay all the tangled threads of our life in the hands of the Master. He can take them, disentangle them, and with them weave beauty and blessing. At the opening of each day let our prayer be, "In thy righteousness bring my soul out of trouble."

If we but learn to begin each busy week day at God's feet with such a morning prayer as this, we shall go forth with bright face, happy heart, strong hand, and firm step to live loyally, faithfully, sweetly, and usefully all the day.

Dr. Arnold's daily morning prayer was: "O Lord, I have a busy world around me; eye, ear, and thought will be needed for all my work to be done in this world. Now, ere I enter on it, I would commit eye and ear and thought to Thee. Do Thou bless them, and keep their work Thine, that as through Thy natural laws my heart beats, and my blood flows, without any thought of mine, so my spiritual life may hold on its course at these times when my mind cannot consciously turn to Thee to commit each particular thought to Thy service. Hear my prayer for my dear Redeemer's sake. Amen."

## PSALM CXLV.

### THE GOD OF THOSE WHO FAIL

**THE** Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all *those that be bowed down.*—Verse 14.

**THE** God of the Bible is the God of the weak and the unfortunate. The Bible is a book of love and sympathy. It is like a mother's bosom to lay one's head upon in the time of distress or pain. Its pages teem with cheer for those who are discouraged. It sets its lamps of hope to shine in darkened chambers. It reaches out its hands of help to the fainting and to those who have fallen. It is full of comfort for those who are in sorrow. It has its many special promises for the needy, the poor, the bereft. It is a book for those who have failed, for the disappointed, the defeated, the discouraged, the crushed, for the broken lives.

It is this quality in the Bible that makes it so dear a book to the universal heart of humanity. If it were a book only for the strong, the successful, the victorious, the unfallen, those who walk erect, those who have no sorrow, those who never fail, the whole, the happy, it would not find such a welcome as it does in this world, whereon it goes.

A writer has said: "You may say what you

please about the inspiration of the Scriptures; but so long as there are tears in the world, and sorrows that make them, so long the books of the New Testament will be considered authoritative; and for this simple reason, that they bring balm to the wants of men where men's wants are most immedicable with any ordinary dealing." What is true of the New Testament is no less true of the Old. So long as there are in this world tears and sorrows, and broken hearts and crushed hopes, human failures and human sin, lives burdened and bowed down, and spirits sad and despairing, so long will the Bible be a welcome book, believed in as of God; an inspired book and full of inspiration, light, help, and strength for earth's weary ones.

"The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down." Wherever there is a weak, fainting, stumbling one, unable to walk alone, to him the heart of the God of heaven goes out in tender thought and sympathy, and the divine hand is extended to support him and keep him from falling altogether. Wherever one has fallen, and lies in defeat or failure, over him bends the Heavenly Father in gentle pity, to raise him up and to help him to begin again.

In the East there was much cruel oppression of the poor. They were wronged by the rich and the strong. They could not get justice in the courts. But all through the Scriptures we find stern condemnation of those who oppress the poor,

who rob them of their rights. The bitterest thing about poverty is not the pain of privation and cold and hunger, but the feeling that no one cares, the sense of being forgotten, the absence of sympathy and love in human hearts, the cruelty of injustice, oppression, and wrong which are the portion of the poor where the love of Christ is not known. But the Bible is full of divine commands against the oppression of the poor. God is ever the friend of the weak, the defender of the defenceless, the helper of those who have no human helper. "The Lord heareth the poor." "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker." "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." Thus the God of the Bible puts Himself on the side of the wronged and oppressed. The widow and the orphan are, especially in Eastern lands, very desolate and defenceless. But God declares Himself their special helper and defender. Amid other laws found in the old Mosaic Code, we come upon this bit of divine gentleness: "Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath shall wax hot." Sheaves were to be left in the field, olives on the tree, grapes on the vine, for the fatherless and the widow.

There should be infinite comfort in these provisions of the ancient law for the widow and the fatherless in all times. The heart of God, which

beat with such tenderness thousands of years ago, is unchanged to-day. The God of the Bible has a partiality of kindness for those who have lost the human guardians of their feebleness. Whereon there is weakness in anyone the strength of God is specially revealed. "The Lord preserveth the simple." The "simple" are those who are innocent and childlike, without skill or cunning to care for themselves, those who are unsuspecting and trustful, who are not armed by their own wisdom and art against the evils of men. "The Lord preserveth the simple;" He takes care of them; He keeps and guards them. Indeed, the safest people in this world are those who have no power to take care of themselves. Their very defencelessness is their protection. "The nest of the blind bird is built by God," says the ancient proverb. Have you ever seen a blind child in a home? How weak and helpless it is! "It is at the mercy of any cruelty which a bad heart may inspire." It is an open prey for all dangers. It cannot take care of itself. Yet how lovingly and safely it is sheltered! The mother-love seems tenderer for the blind child than for any of the others. The father's thought is not so gentle for any of the strong ones as for this helpless one. "Those sealed eyes, those tottering feet, those outstretched hands, have a power to move those parents to labour and care and sacrifice, such as the strongest and most beautiful of the household does not possess."

Now this picture gives us a hint of the special, watchful care of God for His weak children. Their very helplessness is their strongest plea to the divine heart. The God of the Bible is the God of the weak, the unsheltered. He sends His strongest angels to guard them. The children's angels, keepers of the little ones, the weak ones, the simple, appear always before God. Woe unto him, therefore, who touches the least of these!

The God of the Bible is the God also of the broken-hearted. There is a verse in one of the Psalms which says, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart." Then another Psalm says, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." The world pays no regard to broken hearts. Indeed, men oftentimes break hearts by their cruelty, their falseness, their injustice, their coldness, and then move on as heedlessly as if they had trodden only on a worm. The world treads remorselessly upon bruised reeds. Like the old car of Juggernaut, it rolls on, crushing and breaking, without pity, without feeling, never stopping to lift up, to heal, to restore those who are in the way.

But there is One who cares. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." The broken-heartedness attracts God. The plaint of human grief draws Him down from heaven. Physicians in their rounds do not stop at the homes of the well, but of the sick. Surgeons on the battlefield pay no attention to the unhurt, the

unwounded; they bend over those who have been torn by shot or shell, or pierced by sword or saber. So it is with God, in His movements through this world; it is not to the whole and well, but to the wounded and stricken that He comes. Jesus said of His own mission, "He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted." Men look for the glad, the happy, when they seek friends; but God chooses the sorrowing for His sweetest revealings of love.

We look upon trouble as misfortune and failure. We say the life is being destroyed that is passing through adversity. But the truth which we are finding in our search does not so represent suffering. "The Lord raiseth up all those that be bowed down." "The Lord healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds." He is a repairer and restorer of the hurt and ruined life. He takes the bruised reed, and by His gentle skill makes it whole again, till it grows in fairer beauty than ever before.

When a branch of a tree is injured in some way, hurt or bruised, all the tree begins at once to pour of its life into the wounded part, to restore it. When a violet is crushed by a passing foot, air, sun, cloud, and dew all at once begin their ministry of healing, giving of their life to bind up the wound in the little flower. So it is with Heaven; when a human heart is wounded, all the love and pity and grace of God begin to pour forth their sweet blessing of comfort to restore



that which is broken. And we know that much of the most beautiful life in this world comes out of sorrow. As "fair flowers bloom upon rough stalks," so many of the fairest flowers of human life spring from the rough stalk of suffering. We stand with the beloved disciple on the other side, and we see that those who in heaven wear the whitest robes and sing the loudest songs of victory, are they who have come out of great tribulation. Heaven's highest places are filling, not from earth's homes of festivity and tearless joy, but from its chambers of pain, its vales of struggle, where the battle is hard, and from its scenes of sorrow, where pale cheeks are wet with tears and where hearts are broken. The God of the Bible is the God of the bowed down, whom He lifts up into strength. Earth's failures are not failures if God be in them.

St. Paul's experience is very instructive. Christ said to him, in his discouragement: "My strength is made perfect in weakness." That is, we are not weakest when we think ourselves weakest, nor strongest when we think ourselves strong. God's power is made perfect in weakness. Human consciousness of weakness gives God room to work. He cannot work with our strength, because in our self-conceit we make no room for Him. Before He can put His strength into us, we must confess that we have no strength of our own. Then, when conscious of our own insufficiency, we are ready to receive of the divine sufficiency.

St Paul said, when he learned this blessed secret, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Then he added: "For when I am weak, then am I strong." The ones whom God upholds are the ones who without His help would fall. Those whom He raises up are those who but for His uplifting would sink away into utter failure. The power of Christ rests upon those who are weak and know themselves weak. You cannot struggle victoriously alone, but your very weakness draws to you the sympathy and the help of the Lord Jesus Christ. So it comes that the feeblest are the strongest, if they but lean with all their feebleness on the arm of Christ. Your weakness is itself an element of strength if you are truly following Christ.

As it were, weakness is a nerveless arm that God nerves, an empty heart that God fills with His own life. You think your weakness unfits you for noble, beautiful living, or for sweet, gentle, helpful serving. You wish you could get clear of it. It seems an ugly deformity. But really it is something which if you give it to Christ He can transform into a source of power. The friend by your side, whom you almost envy because he seems so much stronger than you, does not get so much of Christ's strength as you do. You alone are weaker than he, but you and Christ are stronger than he. Look at the life of Christ. He was God

manifest in the flesh. What He did, therefore, was a revealing of God's manner of dealing with men. To what class of people did His sympathy and help go out most richly? Did He ally Himself with the strong? Was He drawn to the successful, the prosperous, the victorious? No; it was just the reverse. So marked was His sympathy with the people who had failed, that the prosperous classes said, with a sneer, that He was "the friend of publicans and sinners." All the poor wrecks of humanity in Palestine seemed to be drawn to Him—the sick, the blind, the lame, the lepers, the out-cast—and He never turned one of them away unhelped. His whole life was given up to those who had failed. He lived amid wreckage all His days. His heart turned to the sad, the troubled, the needy, the lost. His own parable told it all—He left the ninety and nine safe sheep in the fold and went after the one that was lost. He explained it by saying, "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." He showed Himself the friend of those who had failed—not because they had failed, but because they were weak, and in danger, and needed Him, and because He would save them. As sickness draws the physician with all his skill and power to heal, so human failure draws the Christ with all His love and life and all His power to lift up and save.

So much for the truth—the God of the Bible

is the God of the weak, of the stumbling, of the fainting, of the fallen, of the unsuccessful, of those who have failed.

Who is there among us to whom this precious truth brings no comfort? Some, perhaps, have not been successful in their earthly business. You have toiled hard, but have not got on. Well, this world's affairs are but the scaffolding of our real life. If they have, meanwhile, been true to God, and faithful in duty, there has been going up inside the rough scaffolding of earthly failure, the noble building of a godly character.

It is oftentimes only at the cost of worldly success that we can reach spiritual beauty. Michaelangelo used to say, as the fragments of marble flew thick on the floor beneath the blows of his mallet, "While the marble wastes, the image grows." So, oftentimes we may say, as God cuts away the externals of our life, "While the outward wastes, the spiritual shines out in greater and greater beauty." You are sure at least always, that your failures and losses do not drive God from you, but draw Him nearer and nearer. "He raiseth up those that are bowed down."