

Facing Times Of Stress: Always In God'S Presence

Why Pray?

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It is no surprise that we live in a world that constantly bombards us with distractions, temptations, and confrontations that interfere with and hinder our fellowship with God. These things can be almost overwhelming challenges if we let them. We often struggle with setting our priorities properly. We set times for meditation, prayer and Bible study, but inevitably something comes up to get in the way of completing them. Oh, how frustrating that can be.

I want to bring to your attention a verse in Psalm 16 by which we should consider our lives together in this world as God's people; that we may find guidance and help as we face the future, and that we may remind ourselves of certain things that are of vital importance to our spiritual growth, and our eternal salvation.

Psalm 16:8-11 I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

What an encouraging passage! If we will just do one thing all these blessings are ours!

Here in Psalm 16 we have a man, a psalmist, telling us how he faces the future. This is a Psalm of David, and David was a man with the same concerns as we have. He had many troubles; he had to face many problems. He brought many of them upon himself, as we do; but many came in spite of him, simply as the result of the world in which he lived, because there were other sinners like himself all around him.

If you read his story, you will find that he lived a very tempestuous sort of life. And yet through it all, with all his sins and faults and failures and all the various calamities that came upon him, you find this man going steadily forward. He was a man who was well-pleasing in God's sight, a writer, a composer—the author of many of these great Psalms in which he celebrates God's goodness by lifting up his heart in praise.

Such a man, obviously, has a great deal to teach us, and here he tells us one of the

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secrets of his life, one of the main things that kept him going. He shows us what it was that enabled him to recover himself when he fell into sin, or when he was almost overwhelmed by trouble.

This psalmist opens his heart to us; and here, in verse 8, he brings us face to face with what was, after all, the grand secret of the life of David, the King of Israel.

Psalm 16:8 I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.

But (and this is a very important addition) this particular Psalm is one of the Messianic Psalms, one of the prophecies of the coming Messiah, the Son of God. Now those who are familiar with their New Testament, as we all should be, will know that this Psalm is quoted very frequently with respect to Jesus Christ Himself, and especially with respect to His resurrection. Consider these words:

Psalm 16:10 For You will not leave my soul in sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

That verse was quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, also by Paul while in Antioch of Pisidia, and again in his Epistle to the Hebrews. It is undoubtedly a reference to Jesus Christ.

So David was not only writing about himself, he was writing as a prophet about the coming Son of God, the Messiah, and therefore these words can be applied to Christ Himself.

In other words, we have in this verse not only the secret of the life of King David, we have also the essence and the secret of the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ when He was here in this world and lived his life as a man. "I have set the Lord always before me." That was how Jesus Himself lived.

Prayer

As you read the accounts of His life on earth in the four Gospels, you find that this is obviously true. Observe His life of prayer. See Him getting up before dawn to pray or spending a whole night in prayer. Why is He praying so much? He is setting God always before Him. It is perfectly clear from the Gospels that Christ, when He was here in the

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flesh, looked to God; He lived for Him and by Him.

We see here, then, that we have a very important principle with regard to our lives in the world. Nothing can be more important than the secret of the life of David, and certainly the secret of the human life of Christ.

As you read the stories of the faithful, you find that this has also been the characteristic note, the outstanding feature in the life of all men and women who have been used by God in an exceptional manner in their lives and ministries.

The Bible contains nearly fifty lengthy prayers recorded in prose sections and several hundred shorter prayers or references to praying. The writers are far more interested in showing people at prayer than in telling about prayer.

The actual biblical practice of prayer shows that the major terms for prayer are conversational; it presupposes a mutual attitude of trust and devotion; it concerns the range of life's concerns. Like a conversation between friends, it provides both a comfort and a challenge, and its purposes include service to others.

The Bible primarily reveals prayer as conversation with God. Expressive verbs for prayer, such as cry or seek, largely reflect the emotional state of the one praying. The primary picture of prayer is simple. It is asking in a conversational manner.

Contained in this asking, which is neither demanding, nor mere wishing, is the expectation that the asker is humble, expectant, and thankful. This conversational, face to face tone includes the elements of speaking, waiting, and listening. When we pray we offer words to God and we must be confident that God hears the sentiment our words express.

Psalms 34:6 This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

Abraham's prayer for Sodom in Genesis 18 uses ordinary speech and suggests a persuasive, but respectful tone. And, David notes the need to wait on God in prayer, and he describes calling out to God and receiving an answer.

Psalms 138:3 When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted.

A conversation through prayer is essential to the intimacy of relating to God. Jesus exemplifies the intimate nature of prayer as conversation. He related to God as a father, yet this intimacy does not diminish His sense of God's holiness. Except for His agonizing cry on the stake, He always addresses God as Father in prayer and teaches his disciples to do the same.

Matthew 6:6-9 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them, for your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name...

In this way, Jesus shows that the dialogue between God and His people should be a more personal conversation. This is reflected in the Apostle Paul's prayer-like openings in his epistles. He emphasizes blessings which are very practical to God and us.

Ephesians 1:2-3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Jesus prays often and urges his disciples to make prayer a part of their lifestyle. He instructs His disciples in prayer and makes prayer His first action in times of trouble. The Gospels record His praying at all important events in his life; for example, at His baptism, transfiguration, selection of the twelve disciples, and at Gethsemane.

Prayer is an exchange of confidence: We assume the stance of a trusting child and pray with faith that is matched by obedience; God remembers our frailty, loves us as His children, hears and answers our prayers. We cannot get to know Him if we use prayer like we use the telephone or send a text message for a few words of hurried conversation. Intimacy requires development. We cannot know God, as it is our privilege to know Him, by brief and fragmentary and unconsidered repetitions of requests for personal favors and nothing more. That is not the way to communicate with the Great God who supplies all our needs, who blesses us abundantly.

Prayer is not a meaningless function or duty to be crowded into the busy and weary ends of the day, and we are not obeying God's command when we content ourselves

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with a few minutes on our knees in the morning rush or late at night when our human faculties, tired from the tasks of the day, long for sleep.

Luke 21:34-36 But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly, for it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch [yourselves] therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

“Always,” here, does not mean that we are to neglect the ordinary duties of life; what it means is that when we come into intimate contact with God in privacy, we are in touch with the Father of which there can be no greater priority.

Prayer then loses every vestige of dread which may previously have existed; we should never regard it as a duty, but rather as a privilege which is to be enjoyed, a delight that will reveal some new wonderful thing. Consistent prayer enables us to escape all the troubles of life. This principle works for avoiding harm by the tumultuous times and circumstances that are extant before Christ's return. It helps us to avoid losing heart, like the point of the parable given about the persistent widow. It helps us to stay faithful to God and His way of life.

The Parable of the Persistent Widow in Luke 18:1-8 teaches the necessity of patient, persistent, and persevering prayer and is much like the Parable of the Persistent Friend in Luke 11:5-13. Both parables are preceded by the mention of prayer. Although delivered under different situations, they both show the absolute and immeasurable contrast between God and human beings, and the evidence that God yields to the saint's pleading and urging.

In the Parable of the Persistent Friend, the persevering prayer was for necessities; in the Parable of the Persistent Widow, the persevering prayer is for protection. Both parables conclude that God will not fail us as friends and acquaintances often do. The Parable of the Persistent Widow is especially linked with the last days and the final great crisis and painful circumstances the faithful remnant must face. A major resource for those who remain true to God at this time of great apostasy is prayer.

Vengeance is God's alone and He will punish all who persecute His elect. He will judge our oppressors, but as we wait for deliverance, persevering prayer is our supply of patience. Perseverance also carries with it the characteristic of consistency and

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regularity and reliability and constancy and steadiness and faithfulness; which means we must be always in God's presence.

This parable is preceded by an exhortation from Christ showing our duty of praying, our dedication to praying, and our resistance against our discontinuation of praying. It ends by indicating that prayer is a matter of faith.

Luke 18:1-8 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Some margins read "*the* faith."—"Will He really find **the** faith on the earth?" The faith delivered to the saints will be a scarce commodity. It is our solemn duty to keep and guard the faith in spite of persecution and trials. This statement implies the answer; and the answer is not good. The implication is that there will not be much faith on the earth when Christ returns, as other Scriptures also indicate.

Two important things are shown here. They are the character of the end times, and the condemnation of faithlessness. First, we know that great wickedness in heresy and apostasy will exist at the end time just prior to the return of Christ to Earth. Second, the word "nevertheless" condemns faithlessness. Even though God works wonderfully in answering prayer, as Scriptures promise, "nevertheless" people will not believe. God has given people every reason to believe. But they have too much faith in the wrong things.

He has given people the glory of the physical realm, signs and wonders, and many infallible proofs that people should believe; but they still will not believe. The end time is manifesting wholesale unbelief.

God has given us every encouragement to pray, to live His way of life, to have faith in Him; and we have to work at making our calling and election sure. And prayer is a major

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tool in the development of our intimate relationship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

Our prayers should not be negative or overly emotional. Rather than destroying ourselves with negative emotions like society does, we must keep things in perspective, looking at them from God's viewpoint. Anger, resentment, and jealousy destroy "faith" in God's goodness and justice.

Intimate conversation with God helps us avoid self-pity; and it develops deep trust in and appreciation for God. Trusting in God means especially the more difficult aspect of faith—submission to His will—in the hope of His resolution of the dilemma. In this spirit of surrender, we find joy.

Psalm 37:3-8 Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret. It only causes harm.

The condition of our enjoyment is nothing less than a positive response to a bad situation. To do good and to take delight in the Lord should be the object of our love and hope.

In verse 3, "trust in the Lord" is expressed in active obedience, in reliance on God. Trust is also a fervent expectation of His justice. In verse 5, to "commit your way to the Lord" is not simple abandonment, but it is a full commitment to transfer our concerns and worries to God, and live our lives according to His will.

The term, "your way" in verse 5, relates to your whole life, including the negative feelings, nagging questions, and concerns of justice. God expects His children to be like children in innocence and to put themselves completely under His fatherly care.

While in verse 3, "trust" was expressed by "doing good," that is, by active obedience, verse 5 expresses trust as waiting for God to act. This waiting is associated with justice. Since God is just and we are His spiritual children, by faith we have the assurance that He will extend justice to us.

Our Own Lives

So let us consider our own lives. How do we feel as we look into the future? What specifically is going to happen? I do not know; nobody knows for sure. I am not going to waste your time trying to predict what will happen, other than to suggest you look to your Bible for the general scenario of what will ultimately happen. There you will find that God's people win in the end.

The ministry's responsibility is to prepare you mentally and spiritually for whatever may happen. Look back over the past year and consider the things that have happened to you. How many of them did you predict? What did you anticipate?

Thankfully, as God's people we do not need to worry about the details of the future. We live through stressful times; one step at a time.

Matthew 6:25 Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

Matthew 6:28 So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin.

Matthew 6:31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Matthew 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

And this principle of setting the Lord always before me, if we put it into operation, will enable us to say, "Whatever happens to us, we know that all will be well; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved." No matter what, we will not be moved, because we are living in the light of this principle: "I have set the Lord always before me."

Let us, then, look at Psalm 16:8 in a very practical manner.

The principles are here, of course, and we spend a great deal of our time with principles

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and with doctrines because they are absolutely essential. But obviously they must be applied, and therefore it is a prudent thing to occasionally pause and be essentially practical to come down to the application of the things we believe.

The Practical Approach—Setting the Lord Before You

So what is the practical approach to this principle? ***It is the determination to live life in the conscious presence of God.*** That is what David the psalmist is saying. He has set the Lord God always before him. He says in essence, “I’m going to live consciously in His presence; as long as I do that, I will not be moved.” This is the primary concern of David’s life, and he emphasizes that by the words that he uses. Notice how he puts it: “I have set the Lord always before me.”

Here is a man who says that he is going to “set” God before him. But what does he mean by this? How can a mortal man manipulate, or “set” God anywhere? We know that that is not what David had in mind. What David was really saying was that he was going to set himself in the presence of God. This is just a human way of speaking. It is just a figure of speech. We say to ourselves, “I have to remind myself so that I will not forget it.” That is the idea!

What David means is that he is going to bring himself into that position. “I have set the Lord” This term is used frequently in the Scriptures. We see it, for example, in the Epistle to the Colossians; although there we actually find the other side of it emphasized. Paul, addressing the Church in Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

We should set ourselves at the right angle—in the correct position. We must have the right perspective; we must constantly look at those things and think on them. David puts it the other way round, but it is exactly the same thing. It is the term itself, however, that is so important for us as we come down to the practicalities of this matter.

Determination

Setting obviously implies determination. It includes an act of will. It implies a very definite decision.

Take an ordinary domestic illustration. You set your alarm clock to go off at a certain time in the morning. Now obviously before you actually do it, you must have decided to do it. You said, “I want to wake up at a given time in the morning, and therefore I am going to set my alarm clock at a given point.” It is the same idea here. It involves

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determination. And, of course, determination involves thought. It involves meditation and consideration. This is the end of an argument, the outcome of a great process of reasoning on David's part.

It is the implementation of a point of view with regard to himself and with regard to the whole of life. Having considered everything, this is the way he is going to live. He has determined to do so. And we must determine, we must decide, we must exercise our will power. I am referring here, of course, to the whole tendency to drift and to allow life to manipulate us and to carry us along. I am sure that as we examine ourselves at this moment, as we look back across our past life, we must be more alarmed at that than at any other single matter—namely, the way in which the months and the years are passing, and we have not done what we proposed to do.

We all sometimes feel like we have wasted our life; we have not done the things we intended, and our blindness came upon us. We are so busy. There are so many things to do. Never has life been more difficult. Life seems to be organized for us, and the most difficult thing in the world is to control our lives, living them as we believe they should be lived.

We have to decide. We must determine, because if we do not, our lives will be governed by the circle in which we live. Many of our days start in frenzy with business and friends and dealings and meetings and so on. And we are all so busy with such things that we almost forget our spiritual purpose and goal. Remember, if Satan can make you busy, he can make you sin.

Action

I have set. I am determined. I am resolved. I will live as in the presence of God!

That is the main concern. But at the same time we must emphasize the element of activity in this, and here again is something very vital. We must stir up ourselves and bring ourselves to this. There are two sides to this Christian life in which we find ourselves. There is the divine initiative without which nothing happens at all. But as the result of that divine initiative, we are meant to initiate things ourselves. When we are dead in trespasses and sins, we can do nothing; but when we are given life, we can; and the Scriptures appeal to us to do so: "Set your affection on things above."

We must take control of ourselves and make ourselves do this. We have to compel ourselves, be rigid with ourselves—discipline ourselves. This involves a very definite activity on our part.

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Some people tend to take the view that we must just go on as we are and pray that God will do something for us. They are waiting for some personal revelation, and in the meantime they tend to do nothing.

This is not scriptural.

We must not just get up in the morning and say, "Well, I don't feel in a very spiritual mood this morning. I hope that I will be a better mood tomorrow." When we feel this way, we must insist on setting the Lord before us. We have to take control of our weaknesses; and we must set God before us and speak to Him. That is what David means. This is an activity. It is not a matter of waiting passively for God to intervene on our behalf. He does do that sometimes, but the people who have had the most frequent intervention from God have been those who have sought Him most diligently.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says,

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

That is the activity that we must undertake. Our faith in God grows as we fellowship with God. We must have both the desire to please Him and the diligence to seek Him. Prayer, meditation on the Word, worship, discipline—all of these help us to always walk with God.

Recollection

A very important step in seeking God is the more practical element of recollection. Setting the Lord before me means that you train and educate yourself in the art of recollection.

David expresses this in at least two ways: Looking for God, and seeing what God has already done for him.

Psalms 63:2 So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory.

Psalms 63:7 Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of

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Your wings I will rejoice.

This is a very important and practical principle. We may believe the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, but what is our heart like? Some people can read the Bible or hear a sermon about the Savior and be unmoved! They think they believe it, but they are not moved.

What should we do if we find ourselves in such a dismal condition? Well, it is wise to do what David did, to practice this art of recollection. This simply means that you remind yourself of what God has done for you in the past. It is a matter of being thankful, grateful, and appreciative of past divine blessings and interventions!

Remember the slightest manifestation that you have ever had of the love of God, and remind yourself of it. Start with that; remind yourself of past blessings. When I was a child attending the Worldwide Church of God back in the 1960s, we used to sing a well-known Protestant hymn. A portion from that hymn puts this perfectly: "Count your blessings, name them one by one; and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done."

It is no use trying to work up your feelings. People who do that in connection with religion are just superficially displaying that they are ignorant of the whole thing. You cannot produce genuine emotions by contrivances. But what you can do is count your blessings.

Just remind yourself of the facts, things that have actually happened to you. Go over them, and make the intellectual effort to exercise your will. Appreciate what God has already done; be thankful for those things. Then you go from there, and remind yourself of the promises of God. As you read your Bible, you will find great promises there. Notice how the Apostle Peter describes God's promises in II Peter.

II Peter 1:4 By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

A promise is an assurance on the part of another of some good for which we are dependent on him. God has not only given us all that we need for physical life, but He has also given us His Word to enable us to develop this life and godliness. These promises are great because they come from the Great God and they lead to a great life. They are precious because their value is beyond calculation. Without the Word of God, we are all hopeless and doomed.

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Peter must have liked the word “precious,” because he wrote about the “precious faith,” the “precious promises,” the “precious blood,” the “precious stone,” and the “precious Savior.”

Go through God's promises, make a list of them; put them down on paper if necessary. And then, prepared with these, go to God and thank Him for them and ask for them.

That is what is meant by recollection. We must remind ourselves in that way. We remind ourselves also of the Being, and character, and attributes of God. God is love, and He is more ready to give than we are to receive.

So then, if we do not know Him as we should, what is the reason? Thinking of these things makes us examine ourselves and see our lethargy; we see that we are sometimes like a spoiled child. We give all our time to trivial things; then we run and ask for a gift from our heavenly parent though we have not done what we are told to do. That is how we sometimes act with God.

How much better it is, if having examined ourselves in humility and repentance, helpless and hopeless, we go to Him. We open our heart and plead with Him. You will find, then, that the hardness and the coldness have gone and the door has been opened to God. This is the great art of recollection.

Psalms 63:1-2 O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a [spiritually] dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory.

Start with what you have, and then go through this process; it will help you to be in God's presence.

Recollection means that you consciously, deliberately, and actively spoken to yourself about yourself, and about your relationship with God.

It means that when you wake up in the morning, before you allow yourself to think about anything else, say to yourself, reminding yourself, “I am a member of God's family and an heir of God's kingdom. God knows me personally, and I belong to Him.”

I must do that, and do it with determination and commitment, because the moment I wake up, human cares and thoughts will come crowding into my mind—perhaps

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temptations, perhaps doubts, all sorts of things. But I must brush them all aside and deliberately remind myself of God and my relationship with Him.

I meditate on that, and then consciously seek the presence of God. To put it another way, I must “practice always being in the presence of God.”

In other words, I say to myself, “God is on His throne, and I am in His presence. God is an eternal being and life and reality. He is NOT a mere term or a philosophical concept—God is on His throne. He is a merciful and loving person, and I want to go into His presence. I want to know Him; I want to speak to Him. I am going to visit God and fellowship with Him.”

That is what David means by setting the Lord always before him.

Reading the Bible

Of course there are many ways of doing this; but one of the most important is the Word, the Bible. God has revealed Himself to us there; so as we read it, we obtain knowledge about God. He is speaking to us through the Word about Himself and about ourselves, so that the more we know it and read it, the more it will take us into the presence of God.

So if you want to set the Lord always before you, spend a lot of time in regular, daily reading of the Bible. And let it be systematic reading, NOT just picking it up at random and turning to a favorite Psalm and then to somewhere in the Gospels.

No, it must be studied from Genesis to Revelation! Go through as much of the whole Bible as you can year by year. Go through it systematically. Many methods have been designed and can be purchased that will tell you how to do this, and will help you to do so.

Also, our [cgg.org](http://www.cgg.org) website can help with this as can our other websites. But we are not here to do your personal Bible study for you.

Or if you like, you can work a system out for yourself. But whatever you do, insist on it. God's Word speaks to you—listen to it, and you will come into His presence. Set Him before you by reading the Bible. As I showed earlier you can do this also in prayer—talking to God and listening to Him.

Those are ways in which you can set Him before you. If you read the stories of the lives

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of the Faithful of Hebrews 11, you see the kind of life they were enabled to live. You will discover that the reason for their living as they did was that they always set the Lord before them.

And so you read that when they were taken desperately ill or when sadness and sorrow came, it did not disturb their self-control, they were not irreversibly upset. They were not inhuman; they did feel these things, and they felt them very acutely. But they did not lose their balance.

They did not feel that all was lost and gone. And when trials and predicaments came, even wars, they did not feel that everything had collapsed. Not at all! They went on, and there was a kind of added energy about their lives and a still greater joy and peace.

That is what you find as you read the story of their lives, and you will find that their secret was that they spent a great deal of time every day communicating with God.

The trouble with most of us today is that we are much too busy. This society entices us to constant distraction. We busy ourselves in various activities. We do not even read as our forefathers did. We watch “sound bites” and read “clippings” and type “text messages.” We do not even communicate very well with each other. That is what Satan’s society has produced—shallow relationships from shallow communications.

The secret of the saints in the past was that they read the Word themselves and prayed and studied and meditated. Not snippets, not mere devotional commentaries—they got down to studying doctrine, to the depths, and they lived in those depths and not merely in the shallows. The result was that they produced sterling character.

Do not let secular life control you. Do not let trivial events in your life determine your direction. Never let anything in the world control you. Do not let your job control you. Do not let anything you do control you. Set the Lord always before you—the Lord Himself—not merely activities in His church because if you do NOT do this, you will become very weary in well doing in all your activities.

Your heart will grow cold; and in the time of need and trouble and trial, you will not know where you are going; and you will be a poor witness of the faith and to the grace that you have received and that you hold.

“I have set the Lord ALWAYS before me” says David, not only when he felt like it. We must do this still more, in a sense, when we least feel like it. The time to do this is especially when we do not feel like it, when we feel weary and anxious and drained of

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energy; then we must especially set Him before us.

Certainly we can all testify to the fact that as we look back across our lives there is nothing, in a sense, that has been more effective than when in a spiritually depressed condition we have deliberately set Him before us and sought Him.

In Psalm 34:10 David wrote, "The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing."

In Proverbs 28:5 Solomon wrote, "Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the Lord understand all."

It is a wonderful thing when suddenly the clouds of puzzlement broke, and the light of understanding shines again. There is nothing more encouraging than to receive an answer to your problem or intervention from God in a crisis. So do this even though you do not feel like it. Do it every day—ALWAYS!

Do not do it irregularly; do not start off wonderfully and then begin to wilt. Always set your affections on God. Put them there, put them at that point, and keep them there. And keep on doing it.

And above all, do not only do this when you are in trouble, which is the tragedy with so many. They have gone on living a humdrum life, saying, "Of course, should things go wrong, I can always turn to God for help."

And then things have gone wrong, and they have turned to Him, but they feel like they cannot find Him.

Isaiah 55:6 says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near."

Hosea 5:5-6 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity; Judah also stumbles with them. With their flocks and herds They shall go to seek the Lord, But they will not find Him; He has withdrawn Himself from them.

So people often feel deserted, and they become excited and alarmed and do not know where they are. They only set the Lord before them when they are in trouble. But if you want to find God when you are facing difficulties, then set Him before you when you are

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not.

Whatever comes: sunshine and rain, storm and calm, affluence and poverty, prosperity and loss, health and sickness—you will be prepared because you have set the Lord ALWAYS before you.

Psalm 55:16-17 As for me, I will call upon God, And the Lord shall save me.
Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice.

In another place (Psalm 119:164) the psalmist says that he engaged in acts of devotion seven times in a day. Daniel prayed three times a day. David went, in his troubles, before God evening, morning, and mid-day, in solemn, earnest prayer.

The Apostle Paul, in a time of great distress, earnestly prayed three times for deliverance from a specific problem.

II Corinthians 2:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

So Paul on three special occasions earnestly prayed for the removal of this thorn in the flesh. It is significant that Jesus had prayed three times in the garden of Gethsemane that the cup might be removed from him. At the third time he ceased, and submitted to what was the will of God.

The Jews were in the habit of praying three times for any important blessing or for the removal of a crisis; and Paul having been a Jew would probably have not only conformed to the usual custom, but especially he would have been likely to imitate the example of Christ.

Biblically, and among the Jews, three is a significant number, and repeated instances

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occur where an important matter is mentioned as having been done three times. Three is the minimum number necessary to establish a pattern of occurrences. A single event can be pure chance; a pair can be mere coincidence; but three consecutive occurrences of an event serve as a symbolic signal indicating special significance.

An episode occurring in threes is a pattern that points to further developments yet to unfold. But three also conveys a sense of completeness or thoroughness to the episode itself; when an event happens three times over, the reality of that event gains emphasis. The figure three implies significance, sufficiency and completeness.

Paul, therefore, earnestly pleaded with God on three different occasions that his thorn in the flesh might be removed from him. So it is right to pray earnestly and repeatedly for the removal of any crisis.

Yet this also shows that there should be a limit to such prayers. Jesus prayed three times; and Paul limited himself to the same number of appeals and then submitted to the will of God.

This does not prove that we should be limited to exactly this number in our appeals; but it proves that there should be a limit; that we should not be over-anxious, and that when it is plain from any cause that the crisis will not be removed, we should submit to it.

Christ in the garden knew that the cup would not be removed, and he accepted it. Paul was told indirectly that his thorn in the flesh would not be removed, and he submitted. We usually do not expect any direct revelation from God, but we may know in other ways that the crisis will not be removed; and we should submit As Jesus and Paul did.

The child or other friend for whom we prayed may die; or the crisis, for example blindness, or deafness, or loss of health, may become permanent, so that there is no hope of removing it; and we should then cease to pray that it may be removed, and we should cheerfully accept and submit to the will of God.

So David prayed most fervently for his child when it was alive; when it was deceased, and it was of no further use to pray for it, he bowed in submission to the will of God.

Biblical imagery is so true and expressive. Zechariah 4:10 says, "the eyes of the Lord...run to and fro through the whole earth." He sees all; He knows all and everything. And because His eye is always on me, it is the essence of wisdom that my eye should be always on Him. Hebrews 4:13 tells us that, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give

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account." Nothing is hidden from His sight.

It is as certain as the fact that I am on earth at this moment that I have to give account to God. None of us knows when we will die and have no more opportunity to be always before Him.

Romans 14:8-12 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

We will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. It is inevitable; it is inexorable. Therefore, set the Lord always before you! It is the essence of wisdom to do this.

Conclusion: The Privilege

Now let us begin to wrap this up by looking briefly at the privilege of doing this. The essence of our Christian lives is to bring us into fellowship with God. By living, by suffering and by dying with Christ; it is Christ who made it possible for us to live and walk in that fellowship.

Enoch walked with God. So did Noah, as well as Abraham, the friend of God, walked with God. And you and I are meant to walk with Him. What a privilege!

It is a tragedy that we have to remind ourselves of this, but we must—Do it always. Set Him always before you. Say, as you wake up in the morning, "What a wonderful thing—another day of walking with God, of walking with Christ!" What a good day it is, if we start our day off like that!

Human reasoning causes us to be miserable creatures, feeling world-weary, tired, depressed, and so on, with all sorts of thoughts and problems coming to mind, we can brush them all aside and say, "God has given me another day, and I am going to talk and walk with Him today and always!" That is the way a Christian should start his day!

Then finally, a word about the comfort of setting the Lord always before us. It is as

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certain as we live that as we start any day we will find ourselves face to face with temptations and challenges.

There is an adversary confronting us who is like a powerful, mighty roaring lion ... seeking whom he may devour; and he will attack us with all his might if God allows it. There is only one comfort as we realize something of the truth of that.

If God is always before us when temptation comes, the situation will be quite different from facing it alone and not knowing that He is there. Those who start the day without realizing all this and without setting God before them are foolish. They are child's play to Satan. So we have to make sure that we have set the Lord before us. And keep it up.

Trials come in many different forms: increasing age, infirmity, sickness, the sickness of a friend or loved one, grief, sorrow, perhaps war, or the coming collapse of the world. Troubles will come sooner or later in some way.

And then there is only one thing that is of value, and that is that we will not be alone, that God will be with us. Christ had comforting words for His disciples on this.

John 16:32-33 Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

That is how Jesus went through it all. His disciples ran away, but He always remembered "the Father is with Me," and He went on. And that is the only way in which you and I can face our temptations, afflictions and crises.

Even when death seems to be near, it is all right. He will be with us; He will not leave us or forsake us. Christ conquered death and the grave; He has gone through it before us.

Therefore, whatever happens, we have only to set Him always before us and to look at Him. We seek Him and ask Him to abide with us. Set the Lord ALWAYS before you, and you will not be moved.