

The Grand Secret!

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It is no surprise that we live in a world that constantly bombards us with distractions and 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 properly setting our priorities. We set times for prayer and Bible study and meditation, but inevitably something comes up to get in the way of completing them. It is extremely frustrating, to say the least. I experience it, you experience it, and sadly, it is not just a one-time thing. It happens over and over again.

Well, there is a *grand secret* for successfully facing these challenges, and it is a grand secret, I assure you. Essential to the solution is Psalm 16, which establishes the foundation by which we may consider our lives together in this world as God's people. It provides guidance and help as we face the future, and it helps remind us 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 [Of course, this is David speaking.]; 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. And who would not want joy and pleasures evermore?

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 us. He had many troubles and he had to face many problems as king far more than we do. He brought many of them upon himself, as we do, but many came despite of him, simply as the result of the world in which he lived and because there were other sinners like himself all around him.

If you read his story, you find that he lived a very tempestuous 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 always steadily forward, with a few setbacks, but then right away, going forward. He was a man who was well-pleasing in God's sight. A writer and a composer and author of many of these great psalms in which he celebrates God's goodness and lifts up his heart in praise.

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

Now it is very important to realize that this psalm is one of the Messianic psalms, one of the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, the Son of God. Those who are familiar with their New Testament, as 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 in verse 10:

Psalm 16:10 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol [or the grave], nor will you allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

That verse was quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost, also by Paul in Antioch, where we were first called Christians, and again in the 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, it was always, "I have set the Lord always before Me." And that was how Jesus Himself lived.

As you read the accounts of His life on earth in the four gospels, you find that this is obviously true. Observe His life in prayer and you see Him getting up before dawn to pray and or spending a whole night in prayer.

Why is He praying so much? In setting God always before Him, it is perfectly clear from the gospels that Christ, when He was here in the flesh, looked to God and He lived for Him and by Him. It is very clear then that we have a very important principle here regarding our lives in the world. Nothing can be more important than this—the secret of the life of David, and certainly of the sinless life of Jesus Christ.

Now, as you read the stories of the faithful, we find that this has also been the characteristic note, the outstanding feature in the life of all the 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 and several hundred shorter prayers or references to praying. The writers are far more interested in showing people at prayer than in talking about prayer.

The actual biblical practice of prayer shows that the major terms for prayer are *conversational*. It is a conversation with God. It presupposes a mutual attitude of trust and devotion, and it concerns the range of life concerns, like a conversation between friends, and it provides both comfort and challenge, and its purposes include service of others. But although it is a conversation as between friends, it is a most reverential, respectful, honored prayer with our Creator God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Contained in this asking in a conversational manner, which is neither demanding nor mere wishing, is the expectation that the asker is humble,

expectant, and thankful. Now this conversational tone, face to face, includes the elements of speaking, waiting, and listening. And when we pray, we offer words to God, and we must be confident that God hears the sentiment of our words or that our words express. Psalm 34:6 typifies this by saying, "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. Also, David notes the need to wait on God in prayer, and he describes calling out to God and receiving an answer. In Psalm 138:3, he says, "In the day I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul."

So conversation through prayer is essential to the intimacy of relating to God. Jesus exemplifies the intimate nature of prayer as conversation, and He related to God as a Father. Yet this intimacy does not diminish His sense of God's holiness. Turn with me, please, to Matthew 6. 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 [That is, blessed, revered, honored] be Your name."

In this way, Jesus shows that the dialogue between God and His people should be a more personal, respectful conversation.

Turn with me now to Ephesians 1. This is reflected in the apostle Paul's prayer type of 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.

That is a lot of spiritual blessings. I have tried to count some of them before, and I have never been able to complete that list. But that was certainly something we should count and remember as Richard pointed out in the commentary.

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

Prayer is an exchange of confidence, and we assume the stance of a trusting child and pray with faith that is matched by obedience. So God remembers our frailty, loves us as His children, and hears and answers our prayers.

We cannot get to know Him if we use prayer as we use the telephone or send a text message for a few words of hurried conversation. Intimacy requires development. Turn with me now over just a couple of chapters to Ephesians 3. 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.

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think [How much higher above our asking and thinking can that possibly be? Not just abundantly but *exceedingly* abundantly, beyond our imagination.], according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

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

Turn to Luke 21. Jesus clearly warns us that discerning the times, being careful how we live our lives, and having an intimate relationship through prayer with God, are requirements for being worthy to escape the world's attitude and impending judgment.

Luke 21:34-36 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life [Hopefully, we are not guilty of the first two, but the cares of this life, it is absolutely every one of us.], 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. [That is over seven billion people.] Watch 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. Sadly, if you are like me, no end of distractions and thoughts come into my mind and pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, and we push them out. We rebuke Satan for introducing some of them, and then we try to continue on. And so it is not easy to continue that heartfelt prayer that we are to give. We all struggle with it and we all fight against it.

Prayer then loses every vestige of dread which may previously have existed, and we should never regard it as a duty, but rather as a privilege which is to be enjoyed, a delight that will reveal some wonderful new thing.

Consistent prayer enables us to escape all the troubles of life, and 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 teaches of 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 and although delivered under different situations, they both show the absolute and immeasurable contrast between God and human beings. It is evident that God yields to the pleading and urging of His saints. In the Parable of the Persistent Friend, the persevering prayer was for necessities. In the Parable of the Persistent Widow, the persevering prayer was for protection. Both parables conclude that God will not fail us as family, friends, and acquaintances sometimes, or maybe often, do.

The Parable of the Persistent Widow is especially linked with the last days and the final great crisis and the 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 regularity and reliability and constancy and steadfastness and faithfulness, which means we must be always in God's presence from where our true joy comes.

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. If we lack in prayer, we lack in 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 there instead of just faith. Will He really find *the* faith on the earth? But hopefully the faith that is delivered to the saints will not be a scarce commodity. It is a solemn duty to keep and guard the faith despite persecutions and trials. So the 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 the faithlessness. First, we know that great wickedness and heresy and apostasy will exist at the end time just prior to the return of Christ to this earth. Second, the word "nevertheless" condemns faithlessness, even though God works wonderfully in answering prayer as Scripture promises. Nevertheless, people will not believe, and God has given people every reason to believe. But they have too much false faith in the wrong things. Many put their faith into the environment or the government or something else other than God, and they make them their god.

Now 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.

Please turn to Psalm 37. God has given us every encouragement to pray, to live His way of life, to have faith in Him. We must work at making our call and election sure, and prayer is a major tool in the development of our intimate relationship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

Our prayer 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 point of view or perspective. 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 Him. Trusting in God means

faith, especially the more difficult aspect of faith, submission to His will in the hope of His resolution of the dilemma. In the 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 will 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.

In one short phrase, what this is talking about is submitting to the will of God. If we submit to the will of God, then we can have prayers that are answered. They are not always answered in the way we want them to be but they are all always answered, and they all end in a good result for everyone.

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 and 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. And that is something we struggle with and work on and try to have 24 hours a day, at least of our waking moments and sometimes of our dreams.

So let us consider our own lives. How do we feel as we anticipate the future? What specifically is going to happen? We do not know exactly. Nobody knows for sure. We can generally know what is going to happen to the world if we read the inspired written Word of God, the Bible. There we find that

God's people are the conquerors in the end. That is the main thing we need to know about the end—we win as long as we submit to God.

Look back over the past year and consider the things that have happened. How many of them did you predict? What did you anticipate? It was impossible to forecast all the insane and idiotic things that happened in 2020. We were absolutely dumbfounded as to what has happened. We might have had inklings of this, that, and the other thing. But do we never had such a complete picture in looking back and being in disbelief at the stupidity of the people in this world, and ignorance of God is the cause.

Thankfully, as God's people, we should not worry about the details of the future. We must live through stressful times one step at a time, planning as best we can with whatever we have.

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."

Think about today. Accomplish the things you need to today. Solve the problems that you can today and do not worry about these things tomorrow. It does not mean do not plan for them or plan to resolve them. But it means do not worry about things beyond today, and that is very hard for us to do having human nature.

Regarding this principle of setting the Lord always before me, putting it into operation will enable us to say that whatever happens to us, we know that all will be well because He is at my right hand and I will not be moved. I will remain faithful and steadfast 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. We spend a great deal of our time with principles and with doctrines because they are essential. But obviously they must be applied, and therefore it is a prudent thing occasionally to pause and be essentially practical to come down to the application of the things that we believe.

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 again how he puts it. "I have set the Lord always before me." But what does he mean by this? How can a mortal man manipulate or set God? And yet we know that that is not what David had in mind. He is not talking about any manipulation or forcing God to do anything.

When we fast we will never be able to force God to do anything for us. The purpose of fasting is to get our minds in the right frame of mind, humble, realizing how small we are and how great God is and asking Him. So that is what it means to ask right. Because, as you know in James it says, you do not get your prayers answered because you ask amiss. It is our *attitudes* that are amiss. So what we say to ourselves, "I have to remind myself so that I will not forget it." That is the idea. This is a human way of speaking. It is a figure of speech.

What David really 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 Paul's epistle to the Colossians, though there we find the other side of it emphasized.

Colossians 3:2 Set your mind 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, and meditate on them. So David puts it the other way around. But it is the same thing. It is the term itself, however, and that is so important for us as we come down to the practicalities of this matter. Setting obviously implies determination. So it includes an act of will and it implies a very definite decision.

Take an ordinary domestic illustration for a moment. You set your alarm clock to go off at a certain time in the morning. Obviously, before you actually do it, you must have decided to do it. So you said, "I want to wake up at a given time in the morning and therefore I'm going to set my alarm clock at a given point." It is the same idea here. It involves 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 regarding himself and regarding 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 decide, we must exercise our willpower, and I am referring to our whole tendency to drift and to allow life to manipulate us and to carry us along.

I am not 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, that is, looking back and realizing that we have not always set God before us. Namely the way in which the months and the years are passing and we have not done what we propose to do. So 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 mentally difficult and complex.

Life seems to be organized for us and the most difficult thing in the world is to control our own lives, living them as we believe they should be lived. We

must decide, we must determine that we are going to do the right thing. Because if we do not, our lives will be governed by the social circle or the work-sphere in which we live. Many of our days start in a 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. That is not only dangerous, that is disastrous. We cannot let that happen. Remember, if Satan can make you busy, he can influence you to sin by distraction.

So what is the main concern? It is that I have set, I am determined, I am resolved to have a mindset that I live my life in the presence of God. At the same time, we must emphasize the element of activity in this and here again is something very vital. We must stir ourselves to action.

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. And when we are dead in trespasses and sin, we can do nothing. But when we are given life we can, and the Scriptures appeal to us to do so.

We must take control of ourselves and make ourselves do this. Thankfully, we have God's Holy Spirit that enables us to do it on a spiritual level. We must compel ourselves, be firm with ourselves, discipline ourselves, and this involves a very definite activity on our part.

Some people tend to take the view that we must just go on just 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. But that is not scriptural. And I have said this over and over again over the years in many sermons that we cannot just kick back, put our feet up, and wait for God to act. He expects us to have works with our faith. 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 in a better mood tomorrow." Never kick this can down the road because it will be a disaster for you.

And when we feel the exact opposite, we must insist on setting the Lord before us in our mind's eye. We must take control of our weaknesses. We must set God prominently in our mind 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 answer our prayers like that sometimes. But the people who have had the most frequent intervention from God have been those who have sought Him most diligently and actively. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul, 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 has a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

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

In the case of health problems, we must do our best to research the problem to determine if we must make any changes to our diet and lifestyle. Are there any deficiencies in our nutrition? We must look into these things, and not just put our hands in the doctor's care.

A very important step in seeking God is the still more practical element of recollection. Setting the Lord before me means that I train and educate myself in the way of recollection. And David expresses this in at least two ways. (1) Looking for God and (2) seeing what God has already done for him. Psalm 63:2 and 7 say, "So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory. . . . Because You have been my help, therefore, in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice." So this is a very important 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 our Savior and be unmoved. They may feel good leaving, but they they feel good because they think that they have done something that will get the points with God. They think they believe it but are not moved. I am not talking about emotion. I am talking about that aspect of our minds that motivates us, the Holy Spirit, combined with our willingness, that motivates us to change.

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 way 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. If you have been in the church for a long time, there have been many, exceedingly abundantly many.

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. It is of 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. Remember that song that we used to sing? Some of you who have been in the church a long time, back in the 1960s? "Count your blessings, name them one by one, count your many blessings, see what God has done." There is a lot of truth in that, and actually it is a pretty good phrase or verse to remember. I do not remember what the rest of the song said, but apparently there was something wrong with it if the church took it out of the hymnal. But that was good, that part.

Just remind yourself of the facts, things that have happened to you, go over them and make the intellectual effort to exercise your will according to God's 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.

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 person 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 His life and godliness and thereby making our call and election sure. These

promises are great because they come from a 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.

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. (And I might add, in addition to what Richard said in the commentary, look through the Bible and find all the "remembers") because when you find those remembers, those are also blessings, or promises, one or the other. Or warnings, I should also add. That is what is meant by recollection. We must remind ourselves in that way.

We remind ourselves also of the benevolence and character and attributes of God. God is love and He is more ready to give than we are to receive. We think that we want to receive what we quite often want in the wrong way.

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 is it if, having examined ourselves in humility and repentance, feeble and discouraged, we go to Him and 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. 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 speak to yourself about yourself and about your relationship to God. And it means that whenever you wake up in the morning, before you allow yourself to think about anything else, you say to 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." So we must do that and do it with determination and commitment, because the moment we wake up, human cares and thoughts will come crowding into our mind, temptations, perhaps doubts, all sorts of things. But we must brush them all aside and deliberately remind ourselves

of God and our relationship with Him. We meditate on that and then consciously seek the presence of God.

To put it another way, we must practice always being in the presence of God. That is what David means by setting the Lord always before him.

Of course, there are many ways of doing this, but one of the most important is reading and studying the Word of God. He 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. Of course, the Holy Spirit is really the power that does that. But we have to be in the right mind for that to be able to happen.

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 organized reading, not just picking it up at random and turning to a favorite psalm and then to somewhere in the gospels. Although there is nothing wrong with that, it is not enough. 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. There are many methods, schedules, and Bibles, apps for phones and computers that have been designed to help you how to do this and helps you to do it also. Our CGG website can help with this, as can our other websites.

But we are not here to do your personal Bible study. We are to help you with it, and of course, you can work a system out for yourself. God's Word speaks to you. Listen to it and you will come into His presence. Set Him before you by reading the Bible.

Now, if we read the stories of the lives of the faithful in Hebrews 11, we see the kind of life they were enabled to live, and that the reason for their living as they did was that they always set the Lord before them. When they were 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 severely, but they did not lose their conviction. 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 find that their secret was that they spent a great deal of time every day communicating with God through prayer, Bible study, and contemplating, which the Bible calls meditating.

Now the trouble with most of us today is that we are much too busy, as I mentioned earlier. This society entices us to constant distraction. We busy ourselves in various activities and we do not even read as earlier generations did. We type and read text messages because even emails are too long to bother sending and reading. We watch short videos because our attention spans are so short. We hear sound bites and read clippings for our daily news. We do not even communicate very well with each other person-to-person anymore. Speaking of society, that is what Satan's society has produced. Shallow relationships from shallow communications and an almost a total lack of love.

The secret of the saints in the past was that they read the Word themselves and prayed, studied, meditated, and fasted—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 God was able to produce sterling godly character in them.

Sounds like a lot of work, does it not? It *is* a lot of work, and it is a lot of determined work and planned work, and we must do it if we want the gift of salvation and reward of a place in God's Kingdom.

Do not let secular life control you. Do not let trivial events in your life determine your direction. Never let anything in the world manipulate you and do not let your job hinder you. We have to have them, but we cannot let them overshadow what we must be doing in our relationship with God. Do not let anything you do deter you from that very thing. *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 weary in well doing in all your activities having to do with God's church and God's way of life. Your heart may grow cold and in time of need, in trouble, in trial, you will not have the answer or

how to meet the challenge. More importantly, you will be unprepared to be an excellent witness of the faith and of the grace that you have received.

Now we must be aware of this essential need, especially when we feel weary and anxious and drained of energy. And usually this happens when we have not sought the Lord and set Him before us. It is neglect that causes it. 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." [that *all* is everything.]

It is a wonderful thing when suddenly the clouds of puzzlement break and the light of understanding shines again. And there is nothing more encouraging than to receive an answer to your problem or intervention from God in a crisis. Nevertheless, many people have gone on living a routine life, saying, "Of course, if things go wrong, I can always turn to God for help." But if they only put the Lord before them when they are in trouble, when things have gone wrong, they feel like they cannot find Him. He is not to be found because of neglect and what should have been done. Hosea 5 refers to what happens when prideful people stumble in sin or in a crisis.

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.

What a fearful thing that is, God to have withdrawn from us. Thankfully, He does not do it quickly. But if we live a life of neglecting Him, we make a separation between ourselves. So people often feel deserted and they become anxious and fearful and do not know where to find help. But really, what they cannot find is God. The problem is, they only seek the Lord when they are in trouble, and the solution is seeking Him before trouble comes your way.

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

You are very familiar with these scriptures, but it has helped so much to remind us of of them—me and you, all of us. What better way to start a new worldly year than to remind ourselves of these things and live our lives by them in the coming year. Whatever comes—whether sunshine or rain, storm or calm, affluence or poverty, gain or loss, health or sickness—you will be prepared because you have lived consciously in His presence. You always remember He is there.

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.

So David went in his troubles before God evening, morning, and midday, in solemn, earnest prayer. In Psalm 119:164 the psalmist says that he engaged in acts of devotion seven times a day. Daniel prayed three times a day and others were formal prayings where you get down on your knees and formally pray to God. There are times during the day where we pray all day long, so to speak, whenever there is a need, work or wherever we are. But those are not those specific, intimate, private, secret prayers with God. The apostle Paul, in a time of great distress, earnestly prayed three times for deliverance from his specific problem that you are well aware of.

II Corinthians 12:7-10 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 when Paul was physically weak, he was spiritually strong and we are the same way if we take pleasure in these things. That is, if we accept God's will and go on from there, counting our blessings. Can we do that? Can we take

pleasure in our infirmities and our sicknesses and all of the other things? The lack of things that we have, in our persecutions, the things that we get anxious over. Can we take pleasure in those things? Not without God's help. He has given us His Holy Spirit so that we can do that, overcome our human nature.

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, and the third time He ceased and submitted to the will of God. Now 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 proper custom, but he would certainly have imitated the example of Christ.

Biblically, among the Jews, three is a significant number. Repeated instances occur when an important matter is mentioned as having been done three times. Three is the minimum number necessary to establish a pattern of a 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 symbol indicating special significance. An episode occurring in threes in 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.

It is right to pray earnestly and repeatedly for God's intervention for health problems and any other crisis. And, of course, when somebody is going through something like that, we are praying all the time—continually. I do not mean every minute of every day, but in a balanced way we continually pray about something like that.

These examples show that there should be a balance, a reasonable limit to such prayers. And 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 or balance in the way that we approach

this. 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 in an attitude of humility and thankfulness for it being completely in God's hands.

Jesus accepted it in the garden and Paul submitted to God's decision about his health. We usually do not expect any directive revelation from God but we may know in other ways that the crisis will not be removed, and we should accept it as Jesus and Paul did. Now the child or friend for whom we pray may die, or the condition, for example, blindness or deafness or health defect may be permanent, so that one is trying to pray about it every day for years.

At what point is one praying in vain? There is no easy answer to that, but we cannot let a single thing become an obsession that dominates our whole life, and that is physically and spiritually unhealthy. You remember, I am sure, David prayed most fervently for his child when it was alive. He prayed every day and no doubt prayed long prayers, and he kept praying and praying. But when it died, since praying was no longer of benefit to the child, he bowed in submission to the will of God and that God had answered, "No." We should thankfully accept His decision and readily submit to His will. Set the Lord always before you and live consciously in His presence.

God promises He will heal us. But often it is a spiritual healing of the mind we receive. But ultimately everything will be healed, whether it be physical or spiritual, but in this life, obviously, God has promised to heal us. But those healings are not always there in this life. So what is the answer to that? Well, I believe the answer is that He has healed this. But He has healed us in our mind, in our attitude and our growth in our character. And He has readied us for for His Kingdom.

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 Jesus Christ. It is Christ who makes it possible for us to live and walk in that fellowship.

I Peter 5:10 [Peter writes] But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

So he says there, "after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." That is His goal in what He is doing when he allows us to suffer, whether it be mental suffering or whether it be physical.

Enoch walked with God. So did Noah, as well as Abraham, the friend of God. And you and I are meant to walk with Him. What a privilege it is! It is a tragedy that we must remind ourselves of this. But we must do it always and remind yourself as you wake up in the morning saying, "What a wonderful thing, another day of walking with God, of walking with Jesus Christ." So what a good day it is, if we start our day like that.

Human reasoning tends to cause us to be miserable. Feeling world weary, tired, depressed, and so on with all kinds of thoughts and problems coming to mind and 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 we Christians should start our day.

Then finally a word about the comfort of setting the Lord always before us. It is certain that as we start any day, we will find ourselves face to face with temptations and challenges. And there is our Adversary confronting us. He is like a powerful, mighty, roaring lion seeking to devour and he will attack us with all his might, if God allows it.

I Peter 5:8-9 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

If God is always before us when suffering a tragedy comes, the situation will be quite different than 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 must make sure that we set the Lord before us constantly and consistently with conviction.

Trials come in many different forms. Increasing age, our own sickness, the sickness of a friend or loved one. Divorce, persecution, or perhaps financial

hardship. Troubles will come sooner or later in some way, and they are a substantial part of life on this planet. But through all the demands of life, there is only one thing that is truly comforting and encouraging. That we will not really be alone and that God will be with us. Christ had comforting words for His disciples and us 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. He always remembered the Father is with Me and He went on. And that is the only way that you and I will can possibly face and finally conquer temptations and afflictions and trials. Even when death seems to be near, He will be with us. He will not leave us nor forsake us. Christ conquered death and the grave, and He has gone through it before us.

Therefore, whatever happens, we have only to set God always before us and seek Him and ask Him to stand by us. And we will not be moved from our faithful conviction and our place in the presence of God.