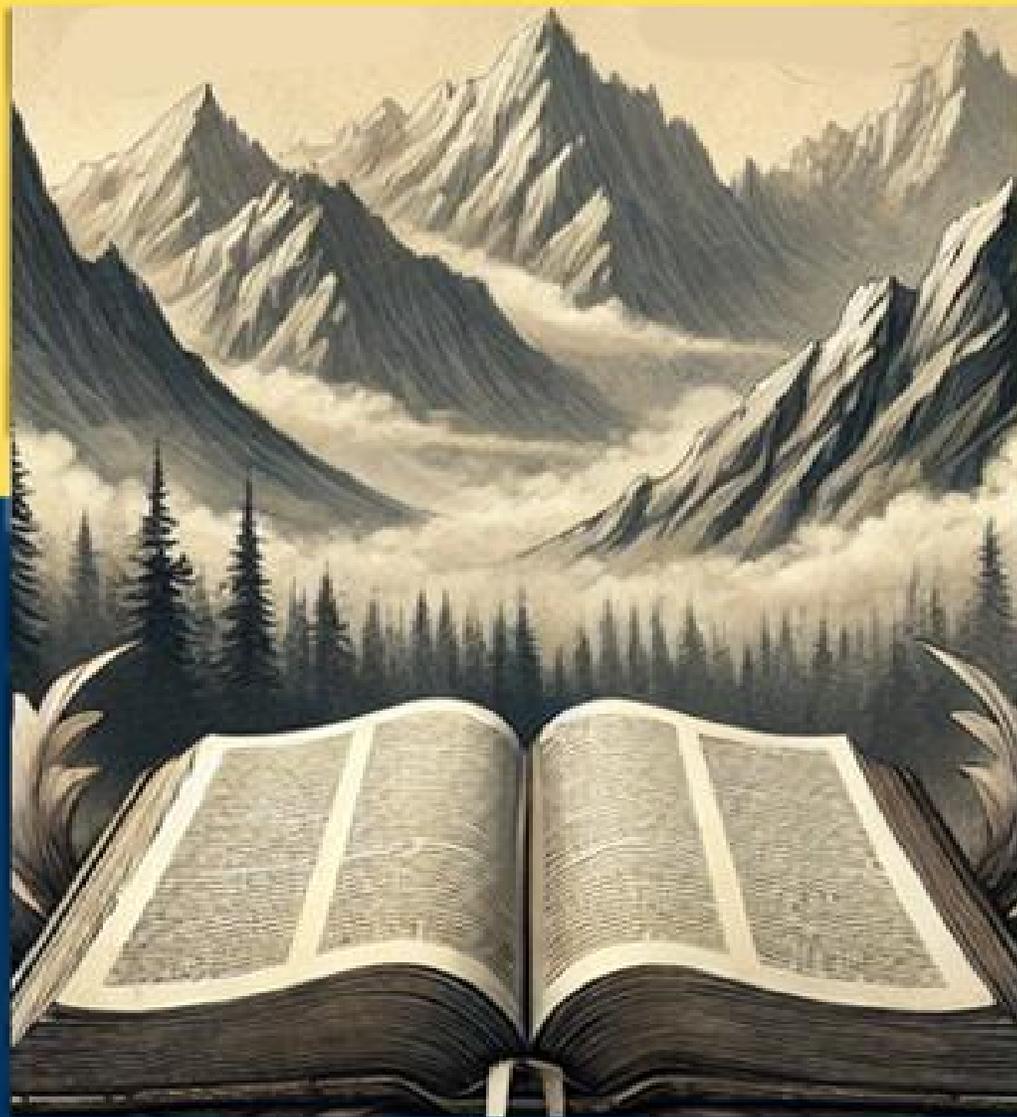
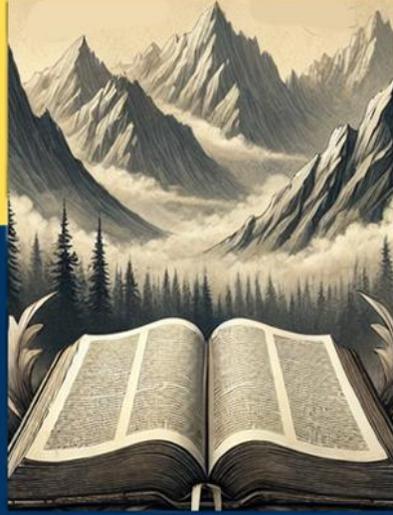


DIRECTIONS FOR  
DAILY  
COMMUNION  
WITH GOD



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# **Directions for Daily Communion with God**

**By Matthew Henry**

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## **TO THE READER**

The first two of these discourses were preached (that is, their substance) at the Morning Lecture in Bethnal Green: the former on August 13, and the latter on August 21, 1712. I was strongly urged by several who heard the latter discourse to publish it. However, at that time, I had no intention of doing so because there are various excellent practical treatises offering similar directions, written by far abler hands than mine. Yet, upon further reflection, I considered that both sermons—on beginning and spending the day with God—when combined, might be of some benefit to those who may not have

access to such larger works. Indeed, the subject is such that, if these sermons could be of any value, they might have a broad and enduring usefulness. As a result, I resolved to expand and revise them extensively, as God would enable me, for publication.

When I shared this thought with some friends, they greatly encouraged me to proceed, suggesting that I add a third discourse on ending the day with God. This subsequently became the subject of an evening lecture on September 3, which I also greatly enlarged and revised. Thus, this collection has come to be what it is now.

I hold a hopeful expectation that, with God's blessing and the work of His grace, this effort may contribute something among ordinary people to promote serious godliness—the ultimate aim of this work. Yet, I must admit that I had not intended to publish it except as a gift for my dearly beloved friends in the countryside, from whom I have recently been separated.

To them, I dedicate this work with the deepest affection and the most sincere regard, as a token of my abiding concern for their spiritual welfare. I pray that their lives may be conducted in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and visit them or remain absent, I may hear encouraging news of their progress—that they stand firm in one spirit, united in purpose, striving together for the faith of the gospel.

I am,

Your cordial and affectionate well-wisher,

MATTHEW HENRY

September 8, 1712

## **The First Discourse:**

### **Showing How to Begin Every Day with God**

"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord, in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up."  
Psalm 5:3

You might consider it an abrupt question if I were to ask you directly—and yet I must earnestly request that you ask yourselves—what has brought you here so early this morning?

And what is your purpose in being here? Whenever we attend upon God in holy ordinances (or indeed, wherever we are), we should be prepared to give a good answer to the question God asked the prophet: *What are you doing here, Elijah?* In the same way, when we leave holy ordinances, we should be ready to answer the question Christ put to those who attended John the Baptist's ministry: *What did you go out into the wilderness to see?*

It is striking to see so many gathered here this morning; surely the fields are white for harvest. I trust it is not simply for a pleasant morning walk that you have come here, nor out of curiosity because the morning lecture has never been held here before. I trust it is not merely to meet friends or seek company but rather with a sincere intention to glorify God, receive grace from Him, and maintain communion with Him. And if you were to ask us, as ministers, about our purpose, we hope we can truly say it is—as God enables us—to

assist and encourage you in this. *Do you come in peace?* the elders of Bethlehem asked Samuel. Perhaps you may ask the same of us. To which we answer, as the prophet did, *In peace I have come to sacrifice to the Lord*—and we invite you to join in this sacrifice.

While the lecture continues, you have the opportunity to more than double your morning devotions. Alongside your personal worship in secret and in your families—which this gathering must not replace or disrupt—you are here to call upon God’s name in the solemn assembly. Participating in prayer together is as much your responsibility in such exercises as hearing a sermon. The origin of the morning exercise itself was a meeting for prayer, initiated at a time when the nation was groaning under the devastating judgement of a civil war. You also have the opportunity to engage with the Word of God: precept upon precept, line upon line. Oh, that as this opportunity awakens you morning by morning, so—as the prophet says—your ears may be awakened to hear as those who are taught (Isaiah 50:4).

But this is not all. Our hope is that lasting impressions will be made upon you through this cluster of opportunities—that this morning lecture will leave you better disposed to morning worship from now on. May these frequent acts of devotion so establish the habit of worship in you that your daily prayers become more natural and effortless, as if second nature.

To aid you in this, I commend to you the example of holy David, as presented in the text. Having resolved in general (verse 2) to abound in prayer and remain steadfast in it—*Unto thee will I pray*—he selects a specific time for it: the morning. *My voice shalt thou hear in the morning*. Not that the morning is the only time; David solemnly committed himself to prayer three times a day, as Daniel

did: *Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud* (Psalm 55:17). Indeed, he did not think that sufficient, for he also declared: *Seven times a day do I praise thee* (Psalm 119:164). Yet he gave particular emphasis to the morning.

**Doctrine:** It is both wise and our duty to begin every day with God.

Let us consider from the text:

**(I.)** The good work itself that we are to do: God must hear our voice, we must direct our prayer to Him, and we must look up.

**(II.)** The specific time appointed and observed for doing this good work, which is in the morning—and again in the morning—that is, every morning, as consistently as the morning comes.

## I. The Good Work

The good work, which by David's example we are taught here, is, in a single word, prayer. This is a duty that is clear from both the light and law of nature, which plainly and loudly declares: *Should not a people seek their God?* However, the gospel of Christ provides us with far greater instruction and encouragement than nature could ever furnish. It tells us what we must pray for, in whose name we must pray, and by whose assistance we must pray. Moreover, it invites us to come boldly to the throne of grace and to enter the holiest place by the blood of Jesus.

This work is not confined to the morning alone but must also be done at other times, indeed at all times. We read of preaching the word *out of season*, but we never read of praying *out of season*. Prayer is never untimely: the throne of grace is always open, and

humble supplicants are always welcome; they can never approach at an inappropriate time.

Let us consider how David expresses his pious determination to remain faithful to this duty.

### **A. "My voice shalt thou hear"**

David's words here can be understood in two ways:

#### **1. As an expression of faith in God's gracious acceptance**

David declares, *Thou shalt*, meaning *Thou wilt hear my voice when, in the morning, I direct my prayer to Thee*. This is the language of faith, grounded in God's promise that His ear will always be open to His people's cries. David had already prayed earlier in the psalm: *Give ear to my words, O Lord* (verse 1) and *Hearken unto the voice of my cry* (verse 2). Here, he expresses confidence in God's response: *Thou wilt hear, I do not doubt it*. Even if the specific request he prayed for is not granted immediately, he is assured that his prayer is heard and accepted. His prayer ascends as a memorial before God, as Cornelius's prayer did. It is recorded and will not be forgotten.

If we examine our own hearts and see evidence that God has prepared them for prayer, we can confidently look ahead and trust that He will incline His ear to hear us. We can be sure of this and must pray with the assurance that God is a prayer-hearing God. Wherever there is a praying heart, God will be found as a prayer-answering God. Even if the voice of prayer is faint or weak, if it comes from a sincere heart, God will hear it with pleasure—prayer is His delight—and He will respond graciously. He has said, *I have heard thy prayer; I have seen thy tears*.

Therefore, when we stand to pray, we must stand firm on this foundation, confident and unwavering: that whatever we ask of God as our Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Mediator, and in accordance with God's will as revealed in Scripture, it shall be granted to us—either in the way we ask or in a better way. This is the promise of John 16:23: *Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.* This promise has been confirmed throughout the ages by the experiences of the saints. Ever since people first began to call upon the name of the Lord, it has been evident that Jacob's God never told Jacob's descendants, *Seek me in vain.* And He will not begin to do so now.

When we come to God in prayer—if we come as we should—we can be confident of this: despite the great distance between heaven and earth, and despite our unworthiness to receive notice or favour, God does indeed hear our voice. He will not turn away our prayers or withhold His mercy.

2. This is rather to be understood as David promising God his constant attendance in the way that God has appointed. *My voice shalt thou hear*—that is, *I will speak to thee.* Because God had inclined His ear to David many times before, David resolved to call upon Him at all times, even to the very end of his life. Not a day would pass without God hearing from him.

It is not, of course, the sound of the voice that God regards. Those who made their voices heard on high during prayer (Isaiah 58:4) misunderstood this. Hannah prayed and prevailed, even though her voice was not heard aloud. It is the voice of the heart that matters. God said to Moses, *Wherefore criest thou unto me?* (Exodus 14:15), even though we do not read of Moses uttering a single word. Prayer is lifting up the soul to God and pouring out the heart before Him.

Yet, as far as expressing the devout affections of the heart in words helps to focus our thoughts and stir up our desires, it is good to draw near to God not only with a pure heart but also with a humble voice. As Hosea puts it, we must "render the calves of our lips."

Nonetheless, God understands the language of the heart, and it is in this language that we must speak to Him. David prays here in verse 1, not only *Give ear to my words* but also *Consider my meditation*. Similarly, he prays in Psalm 19:14: *Let the words of my mouth, proceeding from the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight*.

Therefore, in every prayer, we must speak to God—we must "write" to Him, as it were. Just as we say we have heard from a friend when they send us a letter, we must ensure that God hears from us daily.

## **a. God Expects and Requires It**

Though God has no need of us or our services, and cannot be benefited by them, He requires us to offer the sacrifice of prayer and praise continually.

### **1. To Maintain His Authority and Our Dependence on Him**

By requiring prayer, God maintains His authority over us and reminds us of our constant dependence on Him—something we are prone to forget. Through prayer, we pay homage to Him and honour His name. By repeatedly performing this act, we strengthen our sense of obligation to observe His statutes and obey His laws. This act of worship also fosters a humble attitude, making it easier for us to submit to His will. As the psalmist

says, *He is thy Lord, and worship thou him.* Through frequent humble adoration, we learn obedience by doing obeisance.

## **2. To Demonstrate His Love and Compassion Towards Us**

It would have been an abundant sign of God's concern and goodness if He had simply said, "Let me hear from you whenever there is a need. Call upon me in times of trouble or want, and that will be sufficient." But God shows His fatherly affection by saying, "Let me hear from you every day, even if you have no pressing business." Just as a loving father asks his child, when sending them away, to write frequently, God delights in hearing from His children. As Proverbs 15:8 declares, *The prayer of the upright is his delight.* Christ says to His church, His "dove," *Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely* (Song of Solomon 2:14). At the close of that same Song, Christ speaks to His bride, the church, *O thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it.* How humbling it is that God is more willing to hear our prayers than we are to offer them.

## **b. We Have Something to Say to God Every Day**

Many people do not realise this, and it is both their sin and their loss. They live without God in the world, thinking they can get by without Him. Unaware of their dependence upon Him or their obligations to Him, they have nothing to say to Him. He never hears from them, just as the father in the parable heard nothing from his prodigal son while he was wandering far from home. Such people mockingly ask, *What can the Almighty do for us?* And from there, it is a short step

to asking, *What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?* The result is that they say to the Almighty, *Depart from us.* And so their doom is sealed.

But I hope for better things from you, my brethren. I trust that you are not among those who cast off fear and restrain prayer before God. Surely you all recognise that the Almighty can do great things for you, and that there is much benefit in praying to Him. Therefore, resolve to draw near to God, that He may draw near to you.

We have something to say to God every day.

- 1. As to a friend we love and have freedom with.** Such a friend we cannot pass by without calling on, and we never lack something to say to, even if we have no particular business with him. To such a friend, we unburden ourselves, express our love and esteem, and gladly share our thoughts. Abraham is called the friend of God, and this honour belongs to all the saints. *I have not called you servants (says Christ), but friends.* His secret is with the righteous. We are invited to acquaint ourselves with Him and to walk with Him as one friend walks with another. The fellowship of believers is said to be with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. And do we then have nothing to say to Him?

Is it not reason enough to approach the throne of His grace to admire His infinite perfections, which we can never fully comprehend but can never sufficiently contemplate, and in which we find our delight? To take pleasure in beholding the beauty of the Lord and giving Him the glory due to His name? Do we not have much to say to Him in acknowledging His condescending grace and favour in revealing Himself to us, and not to the world, and in professing our love and

submission to Him? *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.*

God has something to say to us as a friend every day: through His written word, in which we must hear His voice, through His providences, and through our own consciences. He listens to hear if we have anything to say to Him in reply—and it would be very unfriendly of us if we did not. When He says to us, *Seek ye my face*, should not our hearts respond as to one we love, *Thy face, Lord, we will seek?* When He says to us, *Return, ye backsliding children*, should we not readily reply, *Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God?* If He speaks to us with conviction and reproof, ought we not to reply with confession and submission? If He speaks to us with comfort, should we not respond with praise? If you love God, you will not struggle to find something to say to Him—something for your hearts to pour out before Him, which His grace has already placed there.

**2. As to a master we serve and have business with.**

Consider how numerous and significant the matters are that lie between us and God, and you will quickly realise that you have much to say to Him. We are in constant dependence upon Him; all our expectations are from Him. We continually interact with Him, for *He is God with whom we have to do* (Hebrews 4:13).

Do we not know that our happiness is bound up in His favour? It is life—the life of our souls—and it is better than life itself, better than the life of our bodies. And do we not have business with God to seek His favour, to entreat it with our whole hearts, to plead for it as though for our very lives, that He would lift up the light of His countenance upon us, and to present Christ's righteousness as the only basis on which we can hope to obtain God's lovingkindness?

Do we not know that we have offended God, that through sin we have made ourselves deserving of His wrath and curse, and that we daily add to our guilt? And do we not, therefore, have more than enough reason to go to Him—to confess our faults and our folly, to ask for pardon through the blood of Christ, and, in Him who is our peace, to make peace with God? Should we not renew our covenants with Him, relying on His strength to go forward and sin no more?

Do we not know that we have daily work to do for God and for our own souls—the work of the day that must be done in its day? And do we not have business with God to ask Him to show us what He would have us do, to direct us in it, and to strengthen us for it? Should we not seek His assistance and acceptance, asking Him to work in us both to will and to do that which is good, and then to recognise and bless His own work? This is the kind of business a servant has with his master.

Do we not know that we are continually in danger? Our bodies are at risk, along with our lives and comforts. We are constantly surrounded by disease and death—whose arrows fly by night and at noonday. And do we not have business with God, whether going out or coming in, lying down or rising up, to place ourselves under the protection of His providence and to ask that we may be kept by His holy angels? How much more are our souls at risk, and their lives and comforts? It is our souls that our adversary the devil—a strong and cunning enemy—wars against, seeking to devour. Do we not then have business with God to place ourselves under the protection of His grace, to clothe ourselves with His armour so that we may be able to stand against Satan's schemes and attacks? We need God's help so that we are neither surprised into sin by a sudden temptation nor overpowered by a strong one.

Do we not know that we are dying daily, that death is at work within us and steadily approaching, and that death will take us to judgment? And do we not know that judgment will determine our eternal state? Should we not, therefore, have something to say to God in preparation for what lies ahead? Shall we not pray, *Lord, make us to know our end! Lord, teach us to number our days!* Do we not have business with God to examine ourselves so that we may not be judged, and to ensure that our matters are right and well-ordered?

Do we not know that we are members of that body of which Christ is the head? Are we not concerned to prove ourselves to be living members? Do we not have business with God on behalf of the church, to make intercession for it? Have we nothing to say for Zion? Nothing to plead for Jerusalem's ruined walls? Nothing to pray for the peace and welfare of the land of our birth? Are we not part of the family of God—or are we merely children in it—that we would not concern ourselves with its affairs?

Do we have no relatives or friends dear to us, whose joys and griefs we share? And have we nothing to say to God on their behalf? No complaints to bring, no requests to make known? Are none of them unwell or in distress? Are none of them struggling with temptation or disheartened? And do we not have errands to the throne of grace, to seek relief and help for them?

Now, consider all this, and then reflect on whether you truly have nothing to say to God each day—especially in times of trouble, when it is fitting to say to Him, *I have borne chastisement* (Job 34:31), and when, if you have any understanding of your situation, you will say to Him, *Do not condemn me* (Job 10:2).

**c. If you have all this to say to God, what should stop you from saying it—every day? Why should He not hear your**

## **voice when you have so many reasons to speak to Him?**

### **1. Do not let distance stop you from saying it.**

If you need to speak with a friend who is far away, you may not be able to reach them, you may not know where to find them, or you may not be able to get a letter to them, and so your business with them remains undone. But this is not the case with God. Though it is true that God is in heaven and we are on earth, He is near to His praying people in all that they call upon Him for. He hears their voice wherever they are. *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee*, says David (Psalm 130:1). *From the ends of the earth will I cry unto thee* (Psalm 61:2). Even Jonah said, *Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice* (Jonah 2:2). In every place, there is a way open heavenward, thanks to Him who, by His own blood, has consecrated for us a new and living way into the holiest, establishing a connection between heaven and earth.

### **2. Do not let fear stop you from saying it.**

If you have business with a great person, you might be discouraged because they are far above you, or because they are stern and severe towards their inferiors. You might be afraid to speak to them, especially if you have no one to introduce you or to plead your cause. In such cases, you may give up altogether. But you should not feel this way when speaking to God. You may come boldly to the throne of grace, with liberty to pour out your whole soul before Him. His compassion for humble supplicants is so great that even His majesty need not make you afraid. God does not want you to frighten yourselves; rather, He wants you to encourage yourselves. *You have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the Spirit of adoption* (Romans 8:15). By this Spirit, you are brought into the glorious liberty of

the children of God. Furthermore, you have an advocate with the Father. Did children ever need an advocate with their father? But for our strong consolation, God has provided both His immutable promises and the intercession of our High Priest. In His name, we have confident access to the Father.

**3. Do not let God's knowledge of your needs stop you from saying it.**

If you have business with a friend, you might think, "There is no need to trouble myself about it; they already know what I want and desire." It is true that *all your desire is before God*; He knows your needs and burdens. However, He still wants to hear them from you. He has promised relief, but His promise must be sought after. As it says in Ezekiel 36:37, *I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them*. While your prayers do not provide God with new information, they do honour Him. Although your words cannot compel Him to show mercy, prayer can prepare your heart to receive His mercy. Asking is a simple and reasonable condition for receiving His blessings: *Ask, and it shall be given you* (Matthew 7:7). Christ asked the blind men, *What will ye that I shall do unto you?* (Matthew 20:32). Though He knew what they wanted, He required them to state their petition. In the same way, those who touch the top of the golden sceptre must be ready to declare their request.

**4. Do not let other business stop you from saying it.**

If you have business with a friend, you might not attend to it because you do not have the time or because you have other priorities that seem more urgent. But this should never be the case with your business with God. This is the *one thing needful* (Luke 10:42), and all other things must take second place. It is

not necessary to your happiness that you achieve greatness in the world or accumulate wealth, but it is absolutely necessary that you make peace with God, obtain His favour, and remain in His love. No worldly business can excuse you from attending to God, and in fact, the more pressing your worldly concerns, the more you need to turn to God in prayer for His blessing upon them. The closer you keep to prayer and to God in prayer, the more your affairs will prosper.

May I encourage you now to let God frequently hear from you. Let Him hear your voice, even if it is just the voice of your breathing (*Thou hast heard my voice; hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry* - Lamentations 3:56)—this is a sign of life. Even if it is the voice of your groanings, so weak that they cannot be uttered (*The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered* - Romans 8:26). Speak to Him, even if it is in broken words, as Hezekiah did: *Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter* (Isaiah 38:14). Speak to Him often—He is always within hearing. Listen to Him as He speaks to you, and let that guide everything you say to Him. Just as when writing an answer to a business letter, you lay it before you for reference, so must God's Word guide your desires and form the foundation of your expectations in prayer. You cannot expect Him to graciously listen to what you say if you turn a deaf ear to what He says to you.

You can see how often you need to speak with God, and therefore it is vital to grow in your relationship with Him. Be careful not to do anything that might displease Him, and strengthen your dependence on the Lord Jesus, through whom alone you have bold access to the Father. Keep your heart prepared for prayer, and let all your words be pure and sincere, so that you are fit to call on the name of the Lord (*Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may*

*all call upon the name of the Lord - Zephaniah 3:9*). In every prayer, remember that you are speaking to God, and let it show that you have a deep reverence for Him. *Let us not be rash with our mouth, nor hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and we are upon earth* (Ecclesiastes 5:2). If He had not invited and encouraged us to pray, it would have been an unpardonable presumption for sinful creatures like us to speak to the Lord of glory (*Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes - Genesis 18:27*). We must pray sincerely and from the heart, for it concerns both our lives and the eternal life of our souls.

## **B. We Must Direct Our Prayer to God**

God must not only hear our voice, but we must also deliberately and purposefully address ourselves to Him. In the original, the phrase simply reads, *I will direct unto thee*. It may be understood as *I will direct my soul unto thee*, which agrees with Psalm 25:1: *Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul*. Alternatively, it could mean, *I will direct my affections to thee; having set my love upon thee, I will pour out my love to thee*. Our English translation conveys it well as *I will direct my prayer unto thee*, which includes:

### **1. Focusing Our Prayer**

When we pray to God, we must direct our prayers with intention, reflecting a fixedness of thought and a focused mind. Prayer is a solemn act, and we must approach it as people with something of great importance on our hearts and minds. We dare not treat it lightly or trivially. When we pray, we must not offer *the sacrifice of fools*—thoughtless words without understanding or purpose. Instead, we must speak *the words of*

*the wise*—words aimed at achieving some good and meaningful end. We must seek both God’s glory and our own true happiness, which are intertwined in the covenant of grace. In this covenant, God has graciously aligned His glory with our highest good, so that in seeking His glory, we truly and effectively pursue our best interests.

This is what it means to *direct our prayer*—like an archer directing an arrow at a target, with a steady eye and deliberate aim. It requires engaging the heart to approach God, while disengaging it from distractions. Just as an archer closes one eye to focus entirely on the target, so must we set aside all other concerns, gather our wandering thoughts, and summon them to focus fully on the work of prayer. This is work that requires all our attention and is worthy of it. We must be able to say with the psalmist, *O God, my heart is fixed; my heart is fixed* (Psalm 57:7).

2. When I direct my prayer, I will direct it to thee.

This expresses:

### **a. The sincerity of our habitual intention in prayer.**

We must not direct our prayers to people, seeking praise and admiration from them, as the Pharisees did. They announced their devotions publicly, just as they did their acts of charity, to gain a reputation that they knew how to exploit. *Verily, they have their reward*: people commend them, but God detests their pride and hypocrisy. We must not let our prayers wander aimlessly, like those who say, *Who will shew us any good?* Nor should we direct our prayers to the world, seeking its approval or pursuing its riches, as

those are said to do who do not cry unto God with their hearts because *they assembled themselves for corn and wine* (Hosea 7:14).

Let not self—especially carnal self—be the source or focus of your prayers, but let them be directed to God. Let the eye of your soul be fixed on Him as your highest goal when you approach Him. Make it the habitual disposition of your heart to seek to glorify God, that His name may be praised. Let this be the design behind all your desires: that God may be glorified. Let this purpose direct, guide, sanctify, and, when necessary, overrule all your requests. Our Saviour has clearly taught us this in the first petition of the Lord's Prayer: *Hallowed be thy name*. This sets our ultimate goal, and all other requests follow in support of that goal. In that petition, the prayer is directed to the glory of God—in all ways He has revealed Himself, particularly the glory of His holiness. With an eye to the sanctification of His name, we pray for His kingdom to come, His will to be done, and for our daily needs to be met, for our sins to be forgiven, and for us to be preserved from evil. A habitual aim at God's glory reflects the sincerity that is our gospel perfection. This is the *single eye*, and where it is present, the whole soul is full of light. In this way, the prayer is truly directed to God.

## **b. The steadiness of our actual regard to God in prayer.**

We must direct our prayers to God by maintaining a constant awareness of Him as the One with whom we are communicating. Directing our prayers is like directing our speech to the person with whom we are conducting business. The Bible is a letter God has sent to us, and prayer is the letter we send to Him. Just as it is essential for a letter to be addressed, it is equally important that it is

addressed correctly—otherwise, it may go astray, which could have unfortunate consequences. You pray daily, and in doing so, send letters to God. You may not realise what you lose if your letters are misdirected. Will you take guidance, then, on how to ensure your prayers are rightly directed?

**1. Address Him with His titles, as you would when writing to a person of honour.**

Approach Him as the great Jehovah, *God over all, blessed for evermore*; the King of kings and Lord of lords. Address Him as the *Lord God, gracious and merciful*. Let your hearts and mouths be filled with holy adoration and reverence, focusing on those titles of His that inspire a holy awe and a sense of His majesty. This will help you to worship Him with reverence and godly fear. Direct your prayer to Him as the God of glory, *with whom is terrible majesty*, and whose greatness is beyond comprehension. Such an attitude will ensure that you dare not trifle with Him or mock Him in the things you say.

**2. Take notice of your relationship to Him as His children, and do not let that be overlooked or lost in your reverent adoration of His glory.**

I have heard of a godly man who, after his death, left behind a record of his spiritual experiences. Among them, it was noted that on one occasion, during secret prayer, his heart was greatly moved at the start of the prayer in offering to God titles that emphasised His majesty and power—calling Him the Great, the Mighty, and the Terrible God. However, as he continued, he checked himself with the thought: *And why not my Father?* Christ has taught us, both through His instruction and example, to address God as our Father. The Spirit of adoption teaches us to cry, *Abba, Father*. A son, though a prodigal, may return in

repentance and say, *Father, I have sinned*, and though he may feel unworthy to be called a son, he can still humbly and boldly call Him *Father*. When Ephraim bemoans himself as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, God bemoans him as a dear son, as a pleasant child (Jeremiah 31:18-20). If God is not ashamed of this relationship, let us not be afraid to embrace it.

**3. Direct your prayer to Him in heaven.**

This is what our Saviour taught us in the preface to the Lord's Prayer: *Our Father which art in heaven*. This does not mean that He is confined to the heavens, for *the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Him*. However, He is said to have prepared His throne there—not only His throne of governance, from which *His kingdom ruleth over all*, but also His throne of grace, to which we are called to draw near in faith. We must regard Him as the God of heaven, in contrast to the gods of the heathen, who dwell in temples made with hands. Heaven is a high place, and we must approach Him as a God infinitely above us. It is the fountain of light, and we must come to Him as the *Father of lights*. Heaven is a place of perspective, and we must recognise His all-seeing eye upon us, beholding all the children of men. It is a place of purity, and in prayer, we must acknowledge Him as a holy God and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness. Heaven is the firmament of His power, and we must depend on Him as the One to whom power belongs. When our Lord Jesus prayed, He lifted His eyes to heaven, directing us to expect the blessings we need from above.

**4. Direct your letter to be entrusted to the Lord Jesus, the only Mediator between God and humanity.**

Your prayer will surely fail if it is not placed in His hands. He is the *other angel* who adds much incense to the prayers of the

saints, making them fragrant before presenting them to the Father (Revelation 8:3).

What we ask of the Father must be in His name, and what we expect from the Father must come by His hand. He is the High Priest of our profession, ordained to offer gifts on our behalf (Hebrews 5:1). Address your prayer to be left with Him, and He will deliver it with care and speed, making our service acceptable. The poet George Herbert, in his work *The Bag*, movingly describes the wound in Christ's side as He hung on the cross, portraying Him as speaking thus to all believers as He ascends to heaven.

If you have anything to send or write,

I have no bag, but here is room.

Unto my Father's hands and sight,

Believe me, it shall safely come.

That I shall mind what you impart;

Look, you may put it very near my heart.

Or, if hereafter any of my friends

Will use me in this way, the door

Shall always be open. What he sends,

I will present, and something more.

Not to his harm; sighs will convey

Anything to me; listen—despair, away.

## C. We Must Look Up

1. We must look up in our prayers, as those who speak to one above us—infinately above us—the high and holy One who inhabits eternity. We must look up as those who expect every good and perfect gift to come from above, from the Father of lights. In prayer, we must look up as those who desire to enter into the holiest and to draw near with a true heart. With an eye of faith, we must look beyond the world and everything in it. We must look beyond the things of time. For what is this world, and all things here below, to one who has learned to place the right value on spiritual blessings in heavenly places through Jesus Christ?

The spirit of a person at death goes upward (*Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?* - Ecclesiastes 3:21), for it returns to God who gave it. Therefore, as mindful of its origin, it must look upwards in every prayer—towards its God, towards its eternal home—as one whose affections are set on things above, where it has laid up its treasure.

Let us, then, in prayer, lift up our hearts with our hands unto God in the heavens (*Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens* - Lamentations 3:41). In ancient times, it was customary in some churches for the minister to exhort the congregation to pray by saying, *Sursum Corda* (Lift up your hearts). Let us likewise say, *Unto thee, O Lord, do we lift up our souls.*

- 2. We must look up after our prayers.**

## **a. With an eye of satisfaction and pleasure.**

Looking up is a sign of cheerfulness, just as looking down is a sign of melancholy. We must look up as those who, having referred ourselves to God in prayer, are at ease and well-pleased, trusting entirely in His wisdom and goodness, and patiently waiting for the outcome. When Hannah had prayed, she looked up and was no longer downcast: *She went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad* (1 Samuel 1:18). Prayer brings peace to the heart of a faithful Christian; and after we have prayed, we should look up as those who, by God's grace, have found this peace.

## **b. With an eye of observation.**

We must look to see what answers God gives to our prayers. We must look up as one who, having shot an arrow, watches to see how close it comes to the target. We should look within ourselves and observe the state of our hearts after prayer—how well they are aligned with God's will and how ready they are to accept and adapt to it. We should also look around us to see how God's providence is working in our circumstances. If our prayers are answered, we should return with thanksgiving; if not, we should identify and remove any hindrances and continue to wait on Him.

We must take our position on the watchtower, as it were, to see what God will say to us (*I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me* - Habakkuk 2:1) and be prepared to listen to His voice (*I will hear what God the Lord will speak* - Psalm 85:8). We should expect that God will give us an answer of peace, resolving not to return to folly. This is how we

maintain communion with God, confident that whenever we lift up our hearts to Him, He will lift up the light of His countenance upon us. Sometimes the answer comes swiftly: *While they are yet speaking, I will hear* (Isaiah 65:24)—faster than any earthly post can deliver a response. But if the answer is delayed, we must patiently wait after we have prayed.

Let us learn to direct our prayers in this way, and to look up after them. Let us draw near to God in every act of devotion, making it a matter of the heart—otherwise, we achieve nothing. Let us not remain in the outer court of worship when we are both commanded and encouraged to enter within the veil.

**II. For the second point**, the particular time appointed in the text for this good work is **the morning**. The Psalmist seems to emphasise this: *in the morning, and again, in the morning*. Not that we should pray in the morning only, but that we should begin with it. Let the morning be one of the appointed hours of prayer. Under the law, we find that every morning a lamb was offered in sacrifice (*The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning* - Exodus 29:39), and every morning the priest burned incense (*And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning* - Exodus 30:7). The singers also stood every morning to give thanks to the Lord (*And to stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord* - 1 Chronicles 23:30). Similarly, in Ezekiel's temple, it was ordained that offerings would be made every morning (*Thou shalt prepare a burnt offering unto the Lord every morning* - Ezekiel 46:13-15). These practices clearly signify that spiritual sacrifices should be offered by God's people every morning, as consistently as the morning comes. Every Christian should pray in private, and every head of a household should pray with their family, morning by morning—and for good reason.

## **A. The morning is the first part of the day, and it is fitting that He who is first should have the first and be served first.**

The heathen themselves recognised this principle, saying, *A Jove Principium* (literally, “Begin with God”). Whatever we do, we should begin with God. The world had its beginning from Him, as did we, and so it is right that whatever we begin, we include Him in it. From the moment reason begins to dawn in the soul, our days should be devoted to God and spent in His service. *From the womb of the morning, thou hast the dew of thy youth* (Psalm 110:3). The first-fruits were always to belong to the Lord, as were the firstlings of the flock. Through morning and evening prayer, we give glory to Him who is *the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last*. He must be at the beginning and the end of our day, the beginning and the end of our night, for He is the beginning and the end—the first cause and the ultimate purpose.

**Wisdom has said:** *Those that seek me early shall find me* (Proverbs 8:17)—early in life, early in the day. By doing so, we give God the priority He deserves over everything else. This shows our concern to please Him, to present ourselves approved to Him, and to seek Him diligently. The Bible often describes earnestness as doing something early: *I will early destroy all the wicked of the land* (Psalm 101:8). Those who are industrious rise early. David demonstrated the fervour of his devotion when he said, *O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee* (Psalm 63:1).

## **B. In the morning, we are refreshed, renewed, and in the best condition.**

After a night's rest, our spirits are revived, and it is as though we are living a new life. The exhaustion of the previous day is forgotten. While the God of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps, when He acts mightily on behalf of His people, He is described as waking like one out of sleep: *Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine* (Psalm 78:65). If we are ever at our best, it is in the morning. Thus, it has become a saying: *Aurora Musis Amica* ("The morning is a friend to the Muses"). If the morning is a friend to the muses, inspiring creativity, how much more should it be a friend to the graces, inspiring devotion? Just as He who is first should have the first, so He who is best should have the best. When we are at our most alert and capable, we should devote ourselves to what is most important.

Worshipping God is work that requires the best faculties of the soul, offered when they are at their best. Such work is worthy of our best efforts, and it yields the greatest return. David said, *Let all that is within me bless his holy name* (Psalm 103:1)—and even that is barely enough. If there is any gift within us by which God may be glorified, the morning is the most fitting time to stir it up: *Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee* (2 Timothy 1:6). When our spirits are refreshed and renewed, we should say with the Psalmist, *Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early* (Psalm 57:8). Then let us rouse ourselves to take hold of God.

### **C. In the morning, we are most free from company and business**

In the morning, we typically have the best opportunity for solitude and quietness—unless, of course, we are among those sluggards who lie in bed, saying, "*A little sleep, a little slumber,*" until the demands

of their daily work drag them up with the rebuke, “*How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard?*” It is wise for those who have much to do in the world, and hardly a moment to themselves during the day, to set aside time in the morning, before the busyness of the day takes over, for the business of their faith. In doing so, they are wholly present for it and can give it their full attention.

As we should aim to worship God when we are least burdened by inner deadness and dullness, so also should we worship Him when we are least distracted by external interruptions and diversions. The apostle encourages us to *attend upon the Lord without distraction* (1 Corinthians 7:35). That is why one day in seven—the first day of the week, which is the morning of the week—has been set apart for holy work, as a day of rest from other labours. When Abraham went to worship God on the mountain, he left all distractions at the foot of the hill. Similarly, in the morning, let us draw near to God and tend to the matters of eternity before becoming entangled in the affairs of this life. Our Lord Jesus has given us an example of this. His days were filled with public ministry for God and the souls of people, so He rose early in the morning, *a great while before day*, and went to a solitary place to pray before anyone came to Him (Mark 1:35).

## **D. In the morning, we have received fresh mercies from God, which we are called to acknowledge with thankfulness and praise.**

God continually blesses us, daily loading us with His benefits. Every day we have reason to bless Him, for every day He blesses us—particularly in the morning. Therefore, just as He daily bestows upon us the fruits of His favour, which are said to be *new every morning*

(Lamentations 3:23)—not because they are different from the day before but because they remain undeserved and continually needed—so should we daily offer Him expressions of our gratitude. Our devotion, like the fire on the altar, must also be *new every morning* (Leviticus 6:12).

If we have enjoyed a good night, do we not have a reason to go to the throne of grace to give thanks? How many mercies come together to make a good night! Consider the blessings that we often take for granted but are denied to others. Many have no place to lay their heads. Even our Saviour said, *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.* Yet we have homes to live in—peaceful and secure, perhaps even grand homes. We have beds to sleep in—warm, comfortable, perhaps even luxurious ones. We are not forced to wander in deserts, mountains, dens, or caves of the earth, as some of God’s greatest saints were, *of whom the world was not worthy.*

Even those with beds may not have the liberty to lie down in them, being kept awake by the illness of loved ones or fear of enemies. But we have lain down without fear—there have been no alarms of war or persecution. Many lie down but cannot sleep, tossing and turning until dawn because of physical pain or mental anguish. *Wearisome nights* are appointed to them, and their eyes *are held waking.* But we have lain down and slept peacefully, undisturbed. Our sleep has been sweet and refreshing—a blessed pause in the midst of our cares and toils. It is God who gives sleep, as He gives it to His beloved.

Some lie down to sleep and never rise again; they sleep the sleep of death, and their beds become their graves. But we have slept, awakened, and risen again, rested and refreshed. We shake ourselves and carry on as usual because *the Lord hath sustained us* (Psalm

3:5). Without His sustaining hand, we would have sunk under the weight of our own mortality as soon as we fell asleep.

Have we a pleasant morning? Is the light sweet to us—the light of the sun, the light of our eyes? Do these bring joy to our hearts? And should we not acknowledge our debt to Him who opens our eyes and brings forth the morning light upon us? Have we clothes to put on in the morning, garments to keep us warm (*How thy garments are warm - Job 37:17*)? Do we have a change of clothing—not only for necessity but also for adornment?

These blessings come from God. It is His wool and flax that cover our nakedness, and the morning, when we dress ourselves, is the appropriate time to thank Him for it. Yet I suspect we do not do this as consistently as we give thanks for our food when we sit at our tables, though we have just as much reason to do so. Are we healthy and at ease? Have we enjoyed such blessings for a long time? We should be thankful for the constant flow of mercies, just as much as for specific instances of them—especially when we consider how many others are sick and in pain, and how much we ourselves have deserved to suffer.

Perhaps we have experienced a special mercy, either personally or within our families—protection from fire or thieves, from dangers we were aware of, and countless more unseen. Perhaps we endured weeping for a night, but joy came in the morning, calling us to acknowledge God's goodness. Perhaps the destroying angel has passed through, and the arrow that flies by night, which brings desolation in the darkness, has entered others' homes, yet our houses have been spared. Thanks be to God for the blood of the covenant sprinkled on our doorposts, and for the ministry of His holy angels, through whom we have been preserved from the malice of the evil

angels. These *rulers of the darkness of this world* may creep forth like beasts of prey when God makes it dark. To the God of the angels belongs all the glory.

## **E. In the morning, we have fresh opportunities to reflect on God's greatness and glory.**

We should not only take note of the gifts of God's bounty that we personally benefit from—small and self-centred minds stop there—but also of the broader displays of His wisdom and power in the world. These bring honour to His name and contribute to the common good of creation. Psalm 19 appears to be a morning meditation, guiding us to see how *the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork*. We are encouraged not only to appreciate the light and warmth we receive from the heavens but also to praise Him who stretched them out like a curtain, fixed their foundations, and established their laws, by which they continue to this day. *They are all his servants. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge*, proclaiming the eternal power and divine nature of the great Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

The regular and predictable succession of light and darkness, as established in the original creation and covenant, reminds us of God's promise to Noah: *While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease* (Genesis 8:22). It also affirms God's covenant with day and night: *If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season...* (Jeremiah 33:20).

In the morning, look up and observe how the day-spring knows its place and time and holds them precisely. See how the morning light takes hold of the ends of the earth and transforms the air *as clay to the seal*—instantly receiving its impressions (*Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days?* - Job 38:12-14). I was particularly struck by the words of a faithful minister who, in thanking God for the mercies of the morning, said: *How many thousand miles has the sun travelled during the night to bring the morning light to us poor, sinful creatures, who justly deserve to remain buried in the darkness!*

Look up and behold the sun, *as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber*, richly adorned and full of joy, *rejoicing as a strong man to run a race*. Consider how bright its beams are, how sweet its warmth, how powerful its influence. If there is no speech or language where the voice of these natural preachers is not heard, how tragic it would be if there were places where the voices of God's worshippers are not heard in response! Let their praise echo the testimony of the heavens, ascribing glory to Him who causes the morning and evening to rejoice. Whatever others may do, let Him hear our voices praising Him in the morning, as we direct our hearts and worship to Him.

**F. In the morning, we should have fresh thoughts of God and sweet meditations on His name, and these should be offered up to Him in prayer.**

Have we, like David, remembered God upon our beds and meditated on Him in the night watches? When we wake, can we say, as David did, *We are still with God?* If so, we have a wonderful reason to approach the throne of grace. With the words of our mouths, we can

offer up to God the meditations of our hearts, and this will be to Him a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour. If our hearts have been *inditing a good matter*, let our tongues be *as the pen of a ready writer* to pour it out before God (Psalm 45:1).

We have the Word of God to engage with, and we should read a portion of it every morning. Through it, God speaks to us, and we are called to meditate on it day and night. When we do this, it will direct us to the throne of grace and give us countless good reasons to pray. If God, by His grace, directs His Word to our hearts in the morning, that will prompt us to direct our prayers to Him in response.

## **G. In the morning, we must also reflect on the sinful and vain thoughts that may have occupied our minds during the night.**

This is why it is necessary to come to God in prayer each morning to ask for His forgiveness. The Lord's Prayer seems particularly suited for the morning, as we are taught to pray for our *daily bread this day*. Yet even in the morning, we are also to pray, *Father, forgive us our trespasses*. Just as the busyness of the day exposes us to guilt through careless words and actions, so too do the quiet hours of the night make us vulnerable to sin through our corrupt imaginations and the wanderings of an unsanctified, ungoverned mind. It is true that *the thought of foolishness is sin* (Proverbs 24:9). Foolish thoughts are sinful thoughts—the first-born of the old nature, the beginnings of all sin.

How many vain thoughts lodge within us, no matter where we lay our heads? Their name is *legion*, for they are many. *Who can*

*understand these errors? They are more than the hairs of our head. We read of those who work evil upon their beds because they devise it there, and when the morning is light, they practise it (Micah 2:1). How often, during the night, is the mind disquieted with anxious and distrustful thoughts? How often is it polluted by unchaste or lustful thoughts, intoxicated by proud and ambitious thoughts, or soured with malicious and vengeful thoughts? Even at best, our minds are often distracted from devout and pious meditations by countless irrelevant concerns. Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, and these lie down with us and rise with us, for they flow naturally from the corrupt fountain we carry within us wherever we go. As Ecclesiastes warns, in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities (Ecclesiastes 5:2).*

How can we dare to go about our day without first renewing our repentance for the sins we commit nightly as well as daily? Should we not confess to the One who knows the thoughts of our hearts—confessing their wanderings, their rebellion, and their constant inclination to backslide? Should we not cry out to Him about our wayward and disobedient hearts, seeking peace in the blood of Christ and asking Him to forgive even the sinful thoughts of our hearts?

We cannot safely enter the business of the day while still bearing the guilt of unrepented or unpardoned sin.

**H. In the morning, we are preparing ourselves for the work of the day and are therefore compelled to seek God in prayer for His presence and blessing.**

We are invited and encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace—not only to ask for mercy to pardon what we have done wrong, but also to seek grace to help in every time of need. And when is it not a time of need for us? Therefore, what morning should pass without morning prayer? We read of *the duty of every day required* (Ezra 3:4), and in light of this, we should go to God every morning to pray for the gracious direction of His providence concerning us and the gracious work of His Spirit within us.

If we have families to care for and provide for, let us begin every morning by committing them to God in prayer. By placing them under the guidance and governance of His grace, we effectively place them under the care and protection of His providence. Holy Job rose early in the morning to offer burnt offerings on behalf of his children, and we should likewise rise early to offer prayers and supplications for them *according to the number of them all* (Job 1:5). In doing so, we bring God’s blessing to rest on our households.

If we are preparing to engage in the business of our daily callings, let us first look to God for the wisdom and grace to manage these tasks well, with a heart that fears Him and abides in Him. Then, in faith, we can ask Him to bless and prosper our efforts, to strengthen us for the work, to sustain us through the weariness it may bring, to guide our plans, and to grant us joy in the fruits of our labours. If we are embarking on a journey, let us look to God for His presence to go with us, and let us be careful not to go anywhere that we cannot, in good faith, ask Him to accompany us.

If we anticipate opportunities to do good or to receive good, let us pray for God’s help to make the most of them. Let us ask Him to give us the desire, wisdom, skill, and courage to use these opportunities wisely, so that they do not become *a price in the hand of a fool*—

wasted and unprofitable. Each day also brings its temptations; some we may foresee, but many more may take us by surprise. This is why we must earnestly ask God to ensure that we are not led into temptation, but rather protected against every one of them. Whatever company we may enter, let us pray for the wisdom to do good to others and avoid causing harm—and to gain good from them without being harmed ourselves.

We do not know what a day may bring. When we wake in the morning, we have little idea of what news we may hear or what events may unfold before nightfall. Therefore, we should seek God's grace to sustain us through both the duties and the difficulties we cannot foresee, as well as those we anticipate. We should pray for strength to meet the day's challenges, trusting that *as the day is, so shall thy strength be*. We will discover that *sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof* (Matthew 6:34). Thus, it is foolish to worry about tomorrow's events, but wise to focus on today's duties. Let us pray that the supplies of God's grace will be sufficient for today's needs, equipping us fully for every good word and deed, and fortifying us against every evil one.

Let us resolve to think, speak, and act throughout the day in such a way that, come nightfall, we will have no regrets. Let us aim to avoid doing or saying anything for which we may later wish we could undo or unsay.

## **For Application**

**First**, let this word remind us of our omissions, for omissions are sins and will come under judgment. How often has our morning worship been either neglected entirely or performed carelessly? Either the work has not been done at all, or it has been done

deceitfully—no sacrifice brought, or it has been the torn, the lame, and the sick; no prayer offered, or the prayer not directed properly, nor lifted up sincerely. We have received the mercies of the morning—God has not failed in His compassion and care as a loving Father—yet we have neglected the morning’s service, failing shamefully in our duty as His children.

Let us humble ourselves before God this morning for our sin and folly in this matter: that we have so often robbed God of the honour due to Him and ourselves of the benefit of morning worship. God has come into our closets seeking fruit, but He has found little or none. He has listened and heard, but either we did not speak to Him at all, or we did not speak rightly. Some trivial excuse has sufficed to delay or omit it, and when once this good habit has been broken, our conscience has been wounded, its strength weakened, and our diligence has grown cooler. Perhaps, over time, it has been abandoned altogether.

**Secondly**, I urge you, hear this word of exhortation. I know how much consistent and sincere secret worship would contribute to the prosperity of your soul. Therefore, allow me to press this upon you earnestly: let God hear from you every morning. Every morning, let your prayer be directed to Him, and look up.

## **1. Commit to your secret worship; keep it faithfully.**

Do this not merely because it has been handed down as a tradition from your ancestors, but because it is a commandment from the Lord. Set aside specific times for it, and be diligent in keeping them. Those who have lived in total neglect of or frequent omission of

secret prayer should, from this point onward, consider it the most necessary part of their daily responsibilities and the most comforting part of their daily routines. Approach it with consistent care and with increasing delight.

No one with the use of their reason can claim exemption from this duty. What is commanded of some is commanded of all: *Pray, pray, continue in prayer, and watch in the same*. Wealthy people are not as bound to manual labour as the poor, and the poor are not as bound to give alms as the rich, but both are equally bound to pray. The rich are not above the need for prayer, and the poor are not beneath God's acceptance of it. It is never too early for the youngest to begin praying, and those whom age has taught wisdom will still prove foolish at the end if they think they no longer need to pray.

Let no one excuse themselves by saying they cannot pray. If you were starving, you would know how to beg for food; and if you see yourself undone because of sin, can you not beg and pray for mercy and grace? Are you a Christian? Then never, for shame, say, *I cannot pray*, for this is as absurd as a soldier saying he does not know how to handle a sword, or a carpenter saying he cannot use an axe. What are you called to in the fellowship of Christ, if not that through Him you might have fellowship with God? You may not pray as eloquently as others, but pray as well as you can, and God will accept you.

Let no one claim they have no time in the morning for prayer. I dare say you can find time for other things that are far less important. You would be better off sacrificing some sleep than neglecting prayer. And how can you spend your time better, or in a way that brings you greater satisfaction and benefit? All the day's work will prosper more if you begin it with God.

Let no one claim they lack a convenient place for privacy to engage in prayer. Isaac went into the field to pray, and the Psalmist found solitude with God on the corner of the house-top. If you cannot find complete privacy, perform your prayers nonetheless. The fault lies in praying with ostentation, not in praying under unavoidable observation. I remember, when I was a young man travelling to London by stagecoach during King James' reign, there was a gentleman in the company who was unashamed to admit that he was a Jesuit. We had many debates during the journey, and one centred on this: he praised the practice in Catholic countries of keeping church doors always open so people could enter at any time to say their prayers. I replied that this custom was too similar to the behaviour of the Pharisees, who *prayed in the synagogues*, and it did not align with Christ's instruction: *Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet and shut thy door*. Pressed with this argument, he replied vehemently, *I believe you Protestants pray nowhere. For, he said, I have travelled extensively in coaches with Protestants, stayed in inns sharing rooms with them, and watched them carefully, yet I have never observed a single one say their prayers morning or evening, except for one man—and he was a Presbyterian*. I hope there was more malice than truth in what he said, but I mention it as a reminder that even if we cannot always be as private as we wish in our devotions, we must not omit them. Neglecting prayer may not only be a sin, but it could also cause scandal.

## **2. Make your secret worship intentional and earnest.**

Do not be slothful in this duty, but be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Be careful that your devotions do not become mere routine or

formalities, where you go through the motions without engaging your heart. Approach the duty solemnly and sincerely. Be truly intimate with God in your prayers. It is not enough to simply *say your prayers*; you must *pray your prayers*. You must pray as Elijah did, who *prayed earnestly* (James 5:17).

Let us learn to labour diligently in prayer, as Epaphras did, who *laboured fervently in prayers* (Colossians 4:12). We will find that it is *the hand of the diligent* in this duty that brings spiritual riches. God does not measure the worth of your prayers by their length, nor will you be heard for *much speaking* or eloquence. What God requires is *truth in the inward parts*, and it is *the prayer of the upright* that delights Him.

When you have prayed, consider yourselves committed and encouraged to both serve God and trust in Him. Let the comfort and benefits of your morning devotions not be like *the morning cloud that passes away*, but like *the morning light that shines brighter and brighter*.

## **The Second Discourse:**

### **Showing How to Spend Every Day With God**

*"On thee do I wait all the day."* – Psalm 25:5

Which of us can truly say this? Who among us lives this life of communion with God, which is so much our purpose and our blessedness? How far short we fall of the spirit of holy David, even though we have much greater resources for growing in our relationship with God than the saints of old, thanks to the clearer revelations of Christ's mediation. Yet, let weak but sincere Christians take heart and not despair. Remember, even David himself was not always in a spiritual frame of mind to say such things. He had his weaknesses and failings, and yet he was called *a man after God's own heart*. We too have our infirmities, but if they are sincerely lamented, earnestly striven against, and if the habitual inclination of our souls is towards God and heaven, we shall be accepted through Christ—for we are not under the law, but under grace.

Nevertheless, David's declaration in the text shows us what our practice should be: we must wait on God all the day. This phrase conveys two key ideas: patient expectation and constant attentiveness.

## **1. Patient Expectation**

This refers to waiting patiently for God to come to us in mercy. In this sense, *all the day* should be understood figuratively, meaning the entire time that the desired mercy is delayed. In the earlier part of the verse, David prays for God's guidance and instruction: *Lead me in thy truth, and teach me*. He was uncertain and deeply eager to know God's will and ready to follow it. Yet God kept him waiting—David did not yet have clarity about God's direction or what steps he should take. Did David, in his uncertainty, move ahead without God's guidance? No. Instead, he resolved: *On thee do I wait all the day*.

This is reminiscent of Abraham, who attended to his sacrifice from morning until the sun went down, waiting for God to answer his inquiry about his descendants (Genesis 15:5, 12). Similarly, the prophet Habakkuk stood on his watchtower to wait for God's reply, trusting that, even if it was delayed, *at the end it shall speak, and not lie*.

In the verses immediately preceding the text, David refers to God as *the God of his salvation*—the One upon whom he relied for both temporal and eternal salvation. David hoped for deliverance from his present distresses: his *troubles of heart*, which were greatly increased (Psalm 25:17), and from his enemies, who hated him with *cruel hatred* and sought to triumph over him (Psalm 25:2, 19). Trusting that God would indeed be his Saviour, David resolved to wait on Him all the day, emulating Jacob, whose dying words were: *I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord* (Genesis 49:18).

At times, God preempts His people with blessings, answering their prayers before they even call upon Him. He is *in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early* (Psalm 46:5). Yet, at other times, He seems distant, delaying deliverance and keeping His people in a prolonged state of expectation and even uncertainty. The light of comfort may be dim—it is day, but only just. It may be a cloudy and dark day, and the awaited relief does not come until the evening or even far into the night. Sometimes, it is *at midnight* that the cry comes: *Behold, the bridegroom cometh* (Matthew 25:6).

The church's deliverance from her troubles, her triumph in her struggles, and her ultimate rest from oppression—all of this is what we must humbly and patiently wait upon God for. We must wait *all the day*, without distrust or impatience.

## **a. Though it may be a long day.**

Though we may be kept waiting for a long time, far beyond our own expectations. Though, after waiting for what feels like an age, we are told to wait even longer—like the prophet’s servant, who was instructed to go *yet seven times* before perceiving the slightest sign of mercy coming (*Go again seven times* - 1 Kings 18:43). We may have hoped that this person or that situation would bring deliverance, only to face disappointment. *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved* (Jeremiah 8:20). Time drags on, and the opportunities seem to have slipped away—those moments of summer and harvest, when we thought we would reap the fruits of our prayers, efforts, and patience, are gone. The waiting feels endless, and we seem no closer to salvation.

The time that the ark of the covenant stayed in Kirjath-jearim was much longer than anyone had anticipated when it was first lodged there. It stayed for twenty years—so long that *all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord* and began to fear it might remain there forever (1 Samuel 7:2).

But though it may seem like a long day, it is still only a *day*—just one day, and it is known to the Lord: *It shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord* (Zechariah 14:7). While we are kept waiting, the time seems interminable, but the joyful outcome will make it feel brief, even momentary. The waiting is no longer than what God has appointed, and we can trust that His timing is the best timing. His blessings are always worth the wait. Though the time may seem long, it is nothing compared to the days of eternity, when those who patiently endured will be rewarded with everlasting salvation.

## **b. Though it may be a dark day, we must still wait upon God all the day.**

Even if, while we wait for what God will do, we are kept in the dark about what He is doing—or what we should do—we must remain content to wait in the darkness. Even if we *see not our signs* and there is no one to tell us *how long*, let us resolve to wait, no matter how long it takes. For while we do not understand now what God is doing, *we shall know hereafter when the mystery of God shall be finished*.

No one ever experienced greater bewilderment over God's dealings than Job, who said: *I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him* (Job 23:8–9). Yet Job ultimately found peace in resolving to wait on God, saying: *But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold* (Job 23:10). Though Job could not trace God's steps, he trusted God's purpose—that He would act as a refiner, ensuring the gold remained in the furnace no longer than necessary to purify it.

When God's *way is in the sea*—so untraceable that it cannot be followed—we can trust that His *way is in the sanctuary*, where He reveals Himself and His will to be trusted (*Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary* - Psalm 77:13). Even when *clouds and darkness are round about him*, we know that *justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne* (Psalm 77:19; Psalm 97:2). We can trust in the goodness and righteousness of His plans, even when they remain hidden from our view.

## **c. Though it may be a stormy day, we must still wait upon God all the day.**

Even if we are not merely becalmed, unable to move forward, but the wind is contrary and drives us backward—nay, even if the wind is boisterous, the church is tossed with tempests, and seems ready to sink—we must still hope for the best. We must endure and weather the storm with patience.

It is a comfort to know that Christ is in the ship. The church's cause is Christ's own cause; He has taken it upon Himself and will not abandon it. He is in the same vessel as His people, so why should we fear? *Why are ye fearful?* Do not doubt that the ship will safely reach its destination. Even if Christ seems to be asleep for now, the prayers of His disciples will awaken Him, and He will rebuke the winds and the waves. Though the bush burns, if God is in it, it will not be consumed.

But this is not all—Christ is not only in the ship; He is at the helm. Whatever threatens the church is under the control of the Lord Jesus, and He will ensure that it ultimately works for its good. As Mr. George Herbert has so beautifully expressed:

*Away despair, my gracious God doth hear,  
When winds and waves assault my keel,  
He doth preserve it, he doth steer,  
Even when the boat seems most to reel.  
Storms are the triumph of his art,  
Well may he close his eyes, but not his heart.*

This is a timely reminder for today. What God will do with us, we cannot yet tell. But we can be certain of this: He is a God of

judgment, infinitely wise and just, and therefore, *blessed are all they that wait for him* (Isaiah 30:18). God will do His own work in His own way and at His own time. Even if we are driven back into the wilderness just when we thought we were on the borders of Canaan, we must acknowledge that we suffer justly for our unbelief and complaints. Yet, God acts wisely and remains faithful to His promises. His time to judge on behalf of His people and to show compassion to His servants is when He sees that their strength is gone. This has been seen before *in the mount of the Lord* and will be seen again. Therefore, let us remain in an attitude of waiting. Hold on to faith and patience, for *it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord*.

## **2. It also speaks of constant attendance upon Him in the way of duty.**

Here, we take *the day* literally. It was David's practice to wait upon God *all the day*. This means both every day and all day long. It aligns with the command in Proverbs: *Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long* (Proverbs 23:17).

**Doctrine: It is not enough for us to begin every day with God; we must also wait on Him every day and all day long.**

To explain this, I will address:

(I.) What it means to wait upon God; and

(II.) Why we must do this every day and all day long.

## **I. What does it mean to wait upon God?**

We have already discussed how it is our duty to speak to God in solemn prayer each morning. But does this mean our interaction with Him is finished for the rest of the day? Absolutely not. We must continue waiting on Him as someone to whom we are deeply connected and indebted. Waiting on God means living a life of **desire towards Him, delight in Him, dependence on Him, and devotion to Him.**

### **A. It is to live a life of desire towards God.**

To wait on God is to be like a beggar waiting on their benefactor, earnestly desiring to receive from them. It is like the sick and infirm waiting at the pool of Bethesda for the stirring of the water, lingering in the porches with hope of being helped in and healed. When the prophet said, *Lord, in the way of thy judgments we have waited for thee*, he explained it further by saying, *the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee: with my soul have I desired thee* (Isaiah 26:8–9).

Our desire must not be solely for the good things that God gives, but for God Himself—His favour, His love, the manifestation of His name to us, and the workings of His grace within us. We truly wait on God when our souls thirst for Him, *for the living God*, when we long to *behold the beauty of the Lord*, to *taste His goodness*, to bear His image, and to be wholly conformed to His will. We wait on God when we desire to know Him more, love Him better, draw nearer to Him, and be made more fit for His presence. For there is none in heaven or earth that we can desire in comparison to Him.

Our souls should be continually soaring heavenward on the wings of holy desire, always pressing forward toward God and eternity.

Morning prayer is only the beginning. The desire that fuels and gives life to prayer—like the fire on the altar—must be kept burning continually, ready to receive the sacrifices that are placed upon it throughout the day. The soul's inclinations in all its motions must be toward God: serving Him in all we do and enjoying Him in all we have. This is what is meant by the command to *pray always, pray without ceasing, and continue in prayer*. Even when we are not actively addressing God in prayer, our hearts must remain inclined toward Him, just as a healthy person does not always eat but always has an appetite for nourishment.

Thus, we must constantly wait on God as our greatest good, moving continually toward Him.

### **B. It is to live a life of delight in God.**

Waiting on God also means delighting in Him, as a lover delights in their beloved. Desire is love in motion, like a bird on the wing; delight is love at rest, like a bird upon its nest. While our desire must continually long for more of God, our delight must find complete satisfaction in Him. Believing Him to be all-sufficient, we must be entirely content in Him. If He is ours, we have enough.

Do we love to love God? Is it a joy to us to know there is a God, that He is all He has revealed Himself to be, and that He is *our God*—our Creator, who disposes of us as He pleases, and our Covenant God, who disposes all things for our ultimate good? If so, this is waiting on God—always looking to Him with joy and contentment.

Every soul values something as its treasure and reposes in it. What is it for us? Is it God or the world? What do we boast in? What makes us feel secure and complete? The worldly person boasts in their

riches: *They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches* (Psalm 49:6). They take pride in their own strength and their supposed ability to achieve wealth. But the godly person declares: *In God we boast all the day long* (Psalm 44:8). This is what it means to wait on God: to fix our eyes on Him with a sense of secret satisfaction, as one would upon that which is their pride and glory.

What is it that gives us the greatest satisfaction, that we embrace with the deepest contentment? Where do we find rest and comfort, saying, "This is all I need"? The worldly person says to their soul when their barns are full: *Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry*. But the godly person cannot say this until their heart is full of God, Christ, and His grace. Only then can they say: *Return unto thy rest, O my soul*—here you can rest securely.

The godly soul dwells in God, is at home in Him, and finds peace and delight there. Whatever troubles they encounter in the world, they find sufficient comfort and strength in God to balance it all.

**C. To wait on God is to live a life of dependence on Him, like a child who waits on their father, trusting Him completely and casting all their cares upon Him.**

Waiting on God means expecting all good to come from Him, as the source of all good in us and for us, the giver of all good to us, and the protector who shields us from all evil. David explains this in Psalm 62:5: *My soul, wait thou only upon God... for my expectation is from him*. David looked to no one else for the good he needed,

knowing that every creature is to us only what God makes it to be, and that from Him all judgment proceeds.

*Shall we lift up our eyes to the hills? Does our help come from there? Is the dew that waters the valleys merely from the tops of the hills? Shall we look higher, to the heavens, to the clouds? Can they give rain of themselves? No, for if God hear not the heavens, they hear not the earth. We must look above the hills, above the heavens, for all our help cometh from the Lord. Even a king—an ungodly one at that—recognised this truth, saying: If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? Out of the barn-floor, or out of the wine-press?*

Our expectations from God, as long as they are guided by and grounded upon His Word, ought to be humbly confident, with the full assurance of faith. We must trust that no word of God will fail and that *the expectation of the poor shall not perish*. Worldly people place their hope in their riches, saying to their gold: *Thou art my hope; and to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence*. They treat their wealth as their strong city. But for the godly, God alone is their refuge and portion *in the land of the living*. It is to Him alone they say—with holy boldness—*Thou art my hope and my confidence*.

All creation looks to God for sustenance, for *he is good to all*. But especially do His saints wait on Him, for *he is good to Israel*, to His people in a special way. They know His name, and therefore they trust in Him and rejoice, confident that *they shall not be ashamed of their hope*.

**D. To wait on God is to live a life of devotion to Him, like a servant who waits**

## **on their master.**

This involves readiness to observe His will, do His work, and in all things seek His honour and interest. Waiting on God means submitting ourselves completely and unreservedly to His wise and holy directions and plans, and cheerfully accepting and complying with them.

A servant who waits on their master does not choose their own way but follows the master step by step. Similarly, we must wait on God, surrendering our will entirely to His and striving to align ourselves with His purposes. This is the mark of those redeemed by the Lord: *they follow the Lamb wheresoever he goeth*—with implicit faith and obedience.

As the eyes of a servant are fixed on the hand of their master, and the eyes of a maid upon the hand of her mistress, so our eyes must wait upon the Lord, ready to do whatever He appoints and accept whatever He allots. We must say, *Father, thy will be done; Master, thy will be done.*

A servant does not wait on their master merely to perform duties but also to bring honour to their master. Likewise, we must wait on God so that we may be *to him for a name, and for a praise*. His glory must be our ultimate aim, and all that we are, have, and do must be dedicated to that purpose. We must wear His livery, serve in His courts, and follow His guidance as His servants so that *He may in all things be glorified*.

**To wait on God is to make His will our  
rule.**

**1. To make the will of His precepts the rule of our practice, and to perform every duty with an eye to that.**

We must wait on God to receive His commands, resolving to obey them, no matter how much they may contradict our corrupt inclinations or worldly interests. We must wait on Him as the holy angels do, who always behold the face of their Father and stand ready to act at His slightest command, even at the wink of His eye, wherever He may send them. In this way, we must do the will of God, as the angels in heaven do it—those ministers of His who carry out His pleasure, ever at His throne, never out of step with His commands.

David prays here that God would show him His way, lead him, teach him, keep him, and guide him in the path of duty. The text then follows as a plea to enforce that petition: *for on thee do I wait all the day*, ready to receive the law from God's mouth and to obey His orders in everything. It implies that only those who are willing to do what they are taught can expect to be taught by God. *If any man will do his will*—if he is steadfastly resolved, through God's grace, to obey—then he *shall know what his will is*. David prays, *Lord, give me understanding*, and then confidently asserts, *I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it*, like a servant waiting on their master.

Those who go up to the house of the Lord expecting to be taught His ways must go with a humble resolution to *walk in his paths* (Isaiah 2:3). They must pray, *Lord, let the pillar of cloud and fire go before me*, with a heart determined to follow wherever God leads. This is how we are to wait on God all the day.

**2. To make the will of His providence the rule of our patience, and to endure every affliction with submission to**

**that.**

We know it is God who *performeth all things for us*, and that He performs *the thing that is appointed for us*. We can trust that everything God does is good and will work together for the good of those who love Him. In light of this, we ought to submit to and align ourselves with God's will. To wait on the Lord is to say, *It is the Lord; let him do with me as seemeth good to him*, because nothing seems good to Him except what is truly good—and this will become clear to us when God's purposes are fully revealed. Waiting on the Lord means saying, *Not as I will, but as thou wilt*; for who are we to expect things to be according to our mind?

This involves bringing our minds into alignment with our circumstances so that we remain calm and at peace, even when things around us threaten to disturb us.

We must bear every affliction, whatever it may be, because it is the will of God—something He has allotted to us, and He works all things according to *the counsel of his own will*. This is what Christian patience looks like: *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it* (Psalm 39:9). David was silent not because it was pointless to complain, but because he understood that God's hand was in it, leaving no reason to protest.

This acceptance can reconcile us to every affliction, no matter how difficult, because it is the will of God. We must not only remain silent out of respect for God's sovereignty—*Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!*—but also find satisfaction in His wisdom and goodness. Whatever God's providence determines for those who wait on Him, we can rest assured that He does them no wrong and intends no harm.

Even when plagued all day long and chastened every morning, as the Psalmist was, we can still confidently say, *God is good*. We echo Job's words: *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; yet will I wait on him*.

I could expand on the duty of waiting on God by referencing other scriptural expressions that convey the same idea. These expressions encompass much of the honour we are bound to give Him and the fellowship we are privileged to maintain with Him. Truly, *our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*.

## **To wait on God is to always set Him before us.**

*I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved* (Psalm 16:8). It means recognising Him as one who is always near us, always at our side, with His eye upon us, wherever we are and whatever we are doing. More than that, it is to acknowledge that *in him we live, and move, and have our being*, and that we have to do with Him and are accountable to Him.

This principle is central to gospel obedience: *Walk before me, and be thou upright*. True uprightness—our gospel perfection—consists in living every moment as though in God's presence, striving always to please Him and to seek His approval.

## **To wait on God is to have our eyes ever towards the Lord.**

*Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net* (Psalm 25:15). Even though, because of our distance from

Him and the darkness of this world, we cannot see Him clearly, we must still look towards Him. We must look towards the place where His honour dwells, as those who long to know Him and His will, directing everything we do toward His glory. Our aim must be this: *that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.*

Waiting on God means fixing our eyes on Him in all the ways He reveals Himself and being attentive to the displays of His nature and attributes.

## **To wait on God is to acknowledge Him in all our ways.**

*In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths* (Proverbs 3:6). In all our actions and in every aspect of life, we must place ourselves under His guidance and walk in His steps. In every undertaking, we should look to Him for direction and success, committing our way to Him through faith and prayer, trusting Him to act on our behalf. We must invite His presence into all that we do, praying as Moses did: *If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.*

In every blessing we enjoy, we must recognise His hand as the giver. Likewise, in every trial we endure, we must see His hand as the one laying it upon us, learning to accept both good and adversity with grace. Like Job, we must bless the name of the Lord both when He gives and when He takes.

## **To wait on God is to follow Him fully.**

*But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land* (Numbers 14:24). Following God fully means having regard for all His commandments and striving to be complete in obedience to His will. Wherever God leads us and wherever He goes before us, we must follow Him as dear children, walking in His steps. We must follow the Lamb wherever He goes and take Him as our guide in all our journeys.

## **To wait on God is to hope confidently in Him.**

This is what it means to wait on God, and those who do so can wait for Him with joy and expectation. In due time, He will surely reveal Himself to their joy. Solomon's words will hold true for them: *He that waiteth on his master shall be honoured* (Proverbs 27:18). For Christ has promised, *Where I am, there shall also my servant be* (John 12:26).

## **II. For the second point. Having shown you what it is to wait on God, I now move on to show that this must be done every day, and all day long.**

### **A. We must wait on our God every day.**

*Omni die* ("every day"), as some interpret it. This is the daily work to be done each day as the duty of that day requires. Servants in royal courts may have specific weeks or months assigned to them for service, and they are only obliged to attend at those times. But God's

servants are never off duty. *All the days of our appointed time*—the time of our labour and spiritual warfare here on earth—we must be waiting on God (Job 14:14), and we should neither desire nor expect to be released from this service until we reach heaven. There, like the angels, we will wait on God more closely and continuously.

## **We must wait on God every day.**

### **1. Both on Sabbath days and weekdays.**

The Lord's Day is specifically instituted for our attendance on God in the courts of His house. On that day, we must wait on Him, giving glory to His name and receiving both His commands and blessings. Ministers must wait on their ministry (*or ministry*, Romans 12:7), and congregants must wait on it as well, saying, as Cornelius did for himself and his friends: *Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God* (Acts 10:33). It honours God to help fill the assemblies of those gathered before His throne and to increase their number.

The entirety of the Sabbath, except for time spent on works of necessity and mercy, must be devoted to waiting on God. As spiritual priests, Christians are called to this task, and it is their privilege to attend upon God in His house at the appointed time.

But this is not sufficient. We must also wait upon God on weekdays because every day we need mercy from Him, and every day we have work to do for Him. Our attendance upon Him in public ordinances on the first day of the week is intended to fix our focus and prepare us for communion with Him throughout the rest of the week. We fail to fulfil the purpose of the Sabbath if its impressions do not stay with us and influence us during the week. These impressions should

remain in our hearts, shaping our thoughts and actions. Thus, from one Sabbath to the next, and from one season to another, we must strive to maintain a holy and gracious mindset. We must be *in the Spirit on the Lord's Day* so that we may *walk in the Spirit* all week long.

## **2. Both on idle days and busy days, we must be found waiting on God.**

Some days in life are filled with labour and busyness, when our particular duties demand close and diligent attention. However, this does not excuse us from our continual attendance on God. Even when our hands are busy with worldly tasks, our hearts can still wait on God by maintaining an habitual awareness of His providence as our guide and His glory as our ultimate goal. In this way, we remain with Him even amidst our work.

Those who rise early, stay up late, and toil endlessly in pursuit of the world must still wait on God, for without His blessing, all their efforts are in vain. It is nothing but labour in vain, or even *labour in the fire* (Psalm 127:1-2).

Other days may be set aside for rest and leisure. Many of you may have time for recreation and enjoyment, but even when you lay aside your regular work, you must not set aside the duty of waiting on God. If, like Solomon, you decide to *prove yourself with mirth and enjoy pleasure for a time* (Ecclesiastes 2:1-3,), do not allow this to disrupt your communion with God. Keep your eyes fixed on Him even in such moments, and guard against neglecting your fellowship with Him during what you may call an agreeable time with friends.

Whether it is a day of labour or a day of rest, waiting on God will bring light to the burdens of work and sweetness to the comforts of repose. Whether you are occupied with much or little in the world,

you must still wait upon God. This will protect you from the temptations that accompany both busyness and leisure.

### **3. Both in days of prosperity and in days of adversity, we must be found waiting upon God.**

Does the world smile upon us and court us? Even so, let us not turn from attending to God to make our court to the world. No matter how much of the world's wealth we possess, we cannot claim to have no need of God or no further reason to depend on Him. David came close to saying this when, in his prosperity, he declared he would never be moved. But he soon realised his error when God hid His face, and David was troubled (Psalm 30:6).

When our affairs prosper, and God brings plenty into our hands, we must wait on Him as our great landlord, acknowledging our obligations to Him. We must seek His blessing on what we have and His favour alongside it, depending on Him for both its continuance and the comfort it brings. We must wait on God for wisdom and grace to use what He has entrusted to us for the purposes He intends, as stewards who will one day give an account and do not know how soon that day will come. However much of this world's goods we may possess, no matter how richly we enjoy them, we must still wait on God for better things—not only better than what the world gives but better than even what He gives in this world. Let us pray, *Lord, do not let this be my portion forever.*

When the world frowns upon us, and things go very wrong, let us not allow its frowns to frustrate us or frighten us so much that we turn away from waiting on God. Instead, let them drive us towards Him.

Afflictions are sent to lead us to the throne of grace, to teach us to pray, and to make the word of God's grace more precious to us. In days of sorrow, we must wait upon God for the comforts that are sufficient to balance our grief. Job, when in tears, fell down and worshipped God, acknowledging His hand in taking away as well as in giving.

In days of fear, we must wait on God for the courage to silence our fears. Jehoshaphat, in his distress, waited on God and was not disappointed; his heart was strengthened. David too often found his heart established by waiting on God, which brought him to this resolution—a firm anchor for his soul: *What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.*

#### **4. Both in the days of youth and in the days of old age, we must be found waiting on God.**

Those who are young cannot begin their service to God too early. The child Samuel ministered to the Lord, and the scripture places particular honour on his service. Christ Himself was delighted with the hosannas of the children who waited on Him as He entered Jerusalem in triumph. When Solomon, in his youth and upon his accession to the throne, sought wisdom from God, it is written that *the saying pleased the Lord*. God says to Israel, *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness* (Jeremiah 2:2).

To wait upon God is to be mindful of our Creator, and the proper time for this is *in the days of thy youth* (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Those who would serve God well must learn early to do so, for the most

accomplished courtiers are those who are trained at court from a young age.

But does this mean that older servants of Jesus may cease to wait on Him? Certainly not! Their service is still required, and it will still be accepted. God will not cast off His faithful servants in their old age, and so they must not abandon His service. Though the infirmities of age may prevent them from being active labourers in God's family, they may still be waiting servants.

Like Barzillai, who was unfit for the entertainments of earthly courts, they can still find delight in the joys of God's courts. When the Levites reached the age of fifty and were discharged from the more burdensome duties of their ministry, they were still required to wait on God—quietly waiting to honour Him and to receive His comfort.

Those who have done the will of God and have finished their labour need patience to help them wait until they inherit the promise. As they draw nearer to the eternal happiness they are waiting for, their love for God should grow ever deeper. Soon they will be with Him—eternally.

## **B. We must wait on our God all the day.**

*Toto die* (all the day), so we read it. Every day, from morning to night, we must continue waiting on God. Whatever changes may come in our employment, this must remain the constant disposition of our souls. We must attend to God and have our eyes always fixed upon Him. We must not allow ourselves at any time to wander from God or to attend to anything apart from Him, except as it is done in subordination to His will and in service to His glory.

## **1. We must cast our daily cares upon Him.**

Each day brings fresh cares, more or less, which wake with us every morning. We do not need to borrow trouble from tomorrow, for *sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*. Those of you who are heavily involved in the world's business often carry your cares with you all day. Though you may keep them to yourselves, they are always present—sitting with you, rising with you, going out with you, and coming in with you. These burdens are often greater than those around you can perceive. Some, because of the weakness of their spirits, can hardly make decisions without fear and trembling.

Let this burden be cast upon the Lord, trusting that His providence extends to all your affairs, to every event that concerns you, and even to the smallest and seemingly most accidental circumstances. Believe that *your times are in His hand* and all your ways are under His control. Trust His promise that *all things work together for good to them that love God*, and then commit everything to Him, trusting Him to do what seems good in His sight. Rest satisfied in having done so, and resolve to remain at peace. Bring your cares to God by prayer in the morning. Lay them before Him, and then demonstrate throughout the day, by the composed and cheerful state of your spirit, that you have left them with Him—just as Hannah did. After she prayed, she *went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad* (1 Samuel 1:18).

Commit your way to the Lord, and then submit to how He chooses to dispose of it, even if it crosses your expectations. Rest in the assurance God has given you—that He will care for you as tenderly as a loving father cares for his child.

## **2. We must manage our daily business for Him.**

Whatever our calling or employment, we must conduct ourselves with an eye to God's providence, acknowledging that He has placed us in our roles. We must obey His precepts, working diligently as He commands. With an eye on His blessing, we should seek His favour to make our work fruitful and successful. Above all, we must work with the ultimate aim of glorifying Him. This sanctifies our everyday actions, sweetens them, and makes them more pleasant to us.

If Gaius escorts his friends a little way on their journey, it might seem like a small act of courtesy. However, when done *after a godly sort*—to honour them as Christ's followers and to glorify Christ—it becomes an act of Christian piety (3 John 1:6). This principle governs all we do each day: *Whatever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus* (Colossians 3:17). By doing so, we wait on God through Christ, our Mediator.

This principle is especially commended to servants. Even though their work may seem humble, and they are under the authority of earthly masters, they should perform their tasks as *the servants of Christ, working as unto the Lord, and not unto men*. They should work with sincerity, as if working directly for Christ. Such work will be accepted by Him, and He will reward them with the inheritance He has promised (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-24).

Servants, in faithfully and conscientiously carrying out their day's work, wait on God all the day. In doing so, they bring honour to the doctrine of God our Saviour by seeking His glory even in ordinary tasks. They work to earn their bread, but they seek bread to live, and they live—not for themselves or their own pleasure—but to serve God and please Him. Their work fills their time and their place in the world because the God who created and sustains us has commanded that *with quietness we work, and mind our own business*.

### **3. We must receive our daily comforts from Him.**

We must wait on Him as our benefactor, just as the eyes of all things wait upon Him to provide their food in due season: *what He giveth them, that they gather*. To Him, we must look as our Father for our daily bread, and we are directed to ask Him for it—even if we already have it in the house or on the table. We must wait upon Him for a covenant right to it, for permission to use it, for a blessing upon it, for nourishment from it, and for comfort in it. It is through the Word and prayer that we wait on God and maintain communion with Him. By these means, *every creature of God is sanctified to us* (1 Timothy 4:4-5), and its nature is changed. *To the pure, all things are pure*; they receive their provisions through the covenant, not merely through common providence. This makes *a little that a righteous man hath better than the riches of many wicked*, rendering it far more valuable and comforting.

Nothing can more powerfully motivate us to obtain what we have honestly, use it wisely, and give God His due than the realisation that all we possess comes from God's hand. We are stewards of His gifts and will be held accountable. If this thought runs as a golden thread through all the comforts of each day—reminding us that every bite we eat, every drop we drink, every breath we take, and every step we walk is His mercy—it will keep us continually waiting upon Him, as a servant waits on his master's provision. It will add a double sweetness to all our blessings. God desires His mercies to be taken fresh from His compassions, which are *new every morning*. Therefore, we are not to wait on Him once a week, as if gathering provisions at market for the entire week. Instead, we must wait on Him every day and throughout the day, as those who live hand-to-mouth yet live with perfect ease and trust.

#### **4. We must resist our daily temptations and fulfil our daily duties in the strength of His grace.**

Every day brings with it its own temptations. Our Master understood this when He taught us to pray, as regularly as we ask for our daily bread, that we might not be *led into temptation*. There is no business we undertake, nor any enjoyment we partake in, that is free from snares. Satan uses every opportunity to assault us and seeks to draw us into sin. Sin is the great evil that we must constantly guard against, as Nehemiah resolved: *That I should be afraid, and do so, and sin* (Nehemiah 6:13). The only way to secure ourselves is by waiting on God throughout the day. We must not only begin our day by placing ourselves under the protection of His grace, but we must remain under its shelter all day. We must not only go forth in His strength but continue in dependence upon His promise—that His *grace is sufficient for us* and that He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear.

Our waiting on God equips us with the best arguments for resisting temptation and with strength sufficient for each day: *Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might* (Ephesians 6:10). This is what it means to wait on the Lord throughout the day.

We have duties to perform and many opportunities to speak good words and do good works. However, we must recognise that we are not sufficient in ourselves for any good thing—not even to think a good thought. Therefore, we must wait upon God, seek Him, and depend on Him for the light and fire, wisdom and zeal, necessary to properly discharge our duties. By His grace, we will not only be fortified against every evil word and deed but also equipped for every good word and deed. From the fullness that is in Jesus Christ, we must continually draw *grace for grace* by faith: grace for every gracious exercise and grace to help in every time of need.

We must wait on this grace, follow its leading, comply with its operations, and be moulded by it, as wax is impressed by the seal.

### **5. We must bear our daily afflictions with submission to His will.**

We are instructed to expect trouble in the flesh; every day brings something or other that grieves us—perhaps something in our relationships, in our work, or events affecting ourselves, our families, or friends that cause sorrow. We may face daily bodily pain or illness, or encounter setbacks and disappointments in our affairs. In all these, we must wait upon God. Christ requires all His disciples to *take up their cross daily* (Matthew 16:24). We must not wilfully seek out the cross or bring it upon ourselves, but when God places it in our path, we must take it up. We must not step out of the way of duty to avoid it. It is not enough simply to bear the cross; we must take it up willingly, align ourselves with it, and submit to God's will in it—not saying, "This is an evil I must bear because I cannot escape it," but rather, "This is an evil I will bear because it is the will of God."

We must recognise every affliction as appointed by our heavenly Father, discerning His hand in it. In such times, we must wait upon Him to understand why He contends with us—what sin or failing has led to this chastisement, what spiritual ailment He seeks to heal through it—so that we may align ourselves with His purpose in afflicting us and share in His holiness. We must observe the movements of His providence, keeping our eye on our Father's chastening hand, seeking to learn what lesson of obedience He intends us to grasp through our suffering.

We must also wait upon God for strength to bear our burdens, placing ourselves into His everlasting arms, which are always underneath His children to support them during trials. And we must

wait on Him for deliverance, refusing to extricate ourselves by sinful or inappropriate means, nor looking to others for relief. Instead, we must wait on the Lord until He shows us mercy, content to bear the burden until God, in His mercy, removes it. *Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters... so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that He have mercy upon us* (Psalm 123:2,). Even if the affliction is prolonged, we must continue waiting on God, even when He seems to hide His face: *I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth His face* (Isaiah 8:17), trusting that it is only for a *little moment* (Isaiah 54:7-8).

## **6. We must face the daily uncertainties of life with cheerful and complete resignation to divine providence.**

While we remain in this world, we live in constant expectation—hoping for good, yet fearing evil. We do not know what a day, a night, or even an hour will bring, as *we know not what a day may bring forth* (Proverbs 27:1). Each day carries its own unfolding events, often contrary to our expectations. It is easy to waste our thoughts on future concerns that rarely transpire as we imagine. Instead, in all our prospects, we must wait upon God.

**If we are hoping for good news or outcomes,** let us wait upon God as the giver of every good gift, prepared to receive from His hand with a heart of gratitude. When He moves toward us in mercy, we must respond with appropriate affections. Whatever good we anticipate, we must trust solely in God—His wisdom, power, and goodness. However, our hopes must remain humble, modest, and aligned with His will. What God has promised, we may confidently expect, but no more. If we wait upon God with such hope, even if that hope is deferred, it will not make our hearts sick; and even if it is disappointed, we can trust that God will overrule all for our ultimate good. However, when our desire is fulfilled after waiting on God, we

will see it as a manifestation of His love, making it *a tree of life* (Proverbs 13:12).

**If we are in fear of bad news**, of difficult outcomes or sorrowful events, let us wait upon God to deliver us from fear itself and from the things we dread. *I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears* (Psalm 34:4). When Jacob feared his brother Esau, he brought his fears to God, wrestled in prayer, and prevailed for deliverance. As David declared: *What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee*—such waiting upon God shall settle the heart and lift it above the torment of fearful expectations.

**If we are caught between hope and fear**, swaying between the two, let us wait on God, acknowledging Him as the One who holds the issues of life and death, good and evil, and from whom all judgment proceeds. In this state, let us quiet our souls with patient expectation of whatever the outcome may be, resolving to adapt ourselves to His will: hoping for the best, preparing for the worst, and ultimately accepting whatever God sends.

### **For Application**

First, let me further urge you to fulfil this duty of waiting upon God all the day, in some more specific instances, according to what you have to do throughout the ordinary business of the day. We are weak and forgetful, and need constant reminders of our general duties, especially when new occasions arise to perform them. For this reason, I choose to be this specific, that I may act as your reminder.

1. When you meet with your families in the morning, wait upon God for a blessing upon them. Begin with thanksgivings for the mercies that you and your household have jointly received from God during the past night. You and your household must serve

the Lord, must wait on Him. Recognise that it is due to His goodness—He who is the founder and father of the families of the righteous—that you are together. If the voice of rejoicing and salvation is heard in your home, acknowledge this as His doing, and wait upon Him to preserve that unity, to make you a comfort to one another, to enable you to fulfil the duties of every relationship, and to extend the days of your peace and stability. In all your family interactions, in the provisions you make for them, and in the guidance you give concerning them, you must wait upon God, who is the God of all the families of Israel (*Jeremiah 31:1*). Look to Christ, through whom all the families of the earth are blessed.

Every member of the family, sharing in the blessings of the family, must wait on God for the grace to contribute to the family's duties. Whatever difficulties or strains there may be in family relationships, instead of becoming burdened by them or provoked to anger, let them prompt you to wait upon God. He is able to address grievances, to bring balance, and to provide grace to bear whatever cannot be immediately changed.

2. When you are engaged in the education of your children or those under your care, wait upon God for His grace to make your efforts effective. Whether you are teaching them things necessary for life or godliness, guiding them in their general or particular callings, sending them to school in the morning, or assigning them daily tasks, wait upon God to grant them understanding and the ability to succeed in their endeavours. Especially concerning their spiritual growth and calling, remember that it is God who gives wisdom.

If they are slow to learn or do not progress as you would hope, wait on God to bring them forward in His own time. While waiting, continue to encourage and nurture them, trusting that God will bless your patient efforts. Waiting on Him will also help you to remain patient and gentle with them, even in moments of frustration.

Let children and young people also learn to wait upon God in all their daily efforts, as they prepare to serve Him in their generation. If you desire to be a comfort to your family and useful in this world, you must ask God for a wise and understanding heart, as Solomon did, and wait upon Him all the day for it. As you grow in stature, pray that you may also grow in wisdom and in favour with God and man.

**3. When you go to your shops or apply yourselves to the business of your particular calling, wait upon God for His presence with you.**

Your business requires your constant attention every day, and all day long. *“Keep your shop, and your shop will keep you”* is a wise saying, but let your attendance on God in your calling be as constant as your attendance to your calling. See God’s providence in all the events of your work. Begin the day with this thought: *“I am now in the way of my duty, and I depend upon God to bless me in it.”* When you are waiting for customers, wait on God to provide you with opportunities in the calling to which He has appointed you. What you might call “chance customers” should rather be recognised as “Providence customers,” and you should say of any success you gain through them: *“The Lord my God brought this to me.”*

When you are buying and selling, remember that God’s eye is upon you, observing whether you are honest and just in your dealings. Ensure you do no wrong to those you trade with, and let your eye look to Him for discretion. This is the same prudence of which it is

said, *“For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him”* (Isaiah 28:26). Trust in that wisdom to direct your way, for the good man is promised that he shall order his affairs with discretion. Seek also His blessing, which makes rich without adding sorrow, and the honest profit that can only come from diligent and upright work.

Whatever your employment—whether in rural business, city trade, maritime work, or even the duties of managing a household—pursue it with the fear of God in your heart. Depend on Him to make your efforts both enjoyable and fruitful, and to prosper the work of your hands. By doing so, you will guard yourself against the many temptations that accompany worldly business. Waiting on God will free you from the care and anxiety often attached to your daily labours, lift your heart above the temporary and material concerns of this world, and enable you to serve God even in the busiest moments of your day. Thus, your heart will remain fixed on Him even when your hands are fully occupied with the demands of life.

**4. When you take a book in your hands—whether it be God’s Word or any other useful and edifying book—wait upon God for His grace to enable you to make good use of it.**

Some of you may spend a considerable amount of time reading each day, and I trust that none of you lets a day pass without reading some portion of Scripture, either privately or with your family. Be careful, however, that the time you spend in reading is not wasted. It is wasted if you read material that is idle, vain, or unprofitable. It is also wasted if you read what is good—even God’s Word—but fail to pay attention to it, to understand it, or to apply it for your spiritual benefit.

Wait upon God, who has provided you with these resources for the benefit of your soul, and ask Him to make them truly helpful to you. The Ethiopian eunuch serves as a good example: while reading the book of the prophet Isaiah in his chariot, he waited on God to enlighten him, and God sent Philip to help him understand what he was reading.

If you read historical accounts of former times, let your mind reflect on God's wise and gracious providence, which governed the world long before we were born. He preserved His church through those times, and this gives us reason to depend on Him still. As the psalmist reminds us: *"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death"* (Psalm 48:14).

### **5. When you sit down at your tables, wait on God.**

Acknowledge His hand in spreading and preparing a table before you, even in the presence of your enemies and in the company of your friends. Reflect on the grant God made to our first father Adam, and in him to us, of the fruits of the earth: *"Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed... to you it shall be for meat"* (Genesis 1:29). Also, recall the grant made to Noah, our second father, and in him to us: *"Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you, even as the green herb"* (Genesis 9:3). Consider in these grants what a bountiful benefactor God is to humanity, and wait on Him accordingly.

We must eat and drink to the glory of God, and in doing so, we wait on Him. We should receive nourishment for our bodies to better serve our souls in honouring God during our time on earth. We must perceive God's covenant-love in common mercies, enjoying the Creator as we use the gifts of creation. Depend on His word of blessing to make your food nourishing, and if your provisions are

meagre, let faith in His promises make up for what is lacking. Rejoice in Him as the God of your salvation, even when the fig tree does not blossom and there is no fruit on the vine.

## **6. When you visit your friends, or receive their visits, wait on God.**

Turn your heart to Him with thankfulness for the friends and acquaintances in whom you find comfort. Consider it His mercy that your dwelling is not in a wilderness or a solitary desert but among others with whom you can freely converse. Thank Him that you are not cast out from society, burdened and shunned by all around you.

It is also His mercy that you have clothing not just for necessity but for beauty when going out, a mercy of which God says: *“I decked thee with ornaments, and I put earrings in thine ears” (Ezekiel 16:11-12)*. Acknowledge Him for the houses, furniture, and means of hospitality He has provided, both for your own comfort and for that of your friends.

While in the company of others, look to God for wisdom to conduct yourself so as to do good and avoid harm. Pray for the grace to keep your speech seasoned and free from corrupt communication. Seek to abound in words that are good, edifying, and beneficial to the hearers, so that your lips may nourish many.

## **7. When you give alms or perform acts of charity, wait on God.**

Do these acts as unto Him, giving to a disciple in the name of a disciple and to the poor because they belong to Christ. Do not seek the praise of others, but aim for the glory of God with sincerity and integrity. Direct your charity to God, and your alms, like Cornelius' prayers and offerings, will rise as a memorial before Him (*Acts 10:4*).

Ask God to accept your charitable acts so that they may truly be offerings: *“Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings”* (Acts 24:17). Let your good works be *“an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God”* (Philippians 4:18).

Pray for God’s blessing upon what you give, so that it may bring comfort to those who receive it. Trust that even if what you give seems small, like the widow’s two mites, God’s blessing can multiply it and make it go a long way, just as He did with the widow’s barrel of meal and cruse of oil.

Depend on God to replenish what you have given and to reward you abundantly in the resurrection of the just. You are also encouraged to wait on Him for a return even in this life. Your charity is like bread cast upon the waters, which you will find again after many days. Watch carefully for God’s providence, and observe how He faithfully honours His promises and repays your good works. In this, you will see His lovingkindness and understand His faithfulness to His Word.

### **8. When you inquire about public news, wait upon God.**

Do so with an eye to Him, because you are genuinely concerned for the interests of His kingdom in the world, holding them close to your heart. Let your inquiry stem from compassion for humanity—for the lives and souls of people, and especially for God’s people. Ask, “What news?” not like the Athenians, merely to satisfy a vain curiosity or to pass the time idly, but so that you may know how to direct your prayers and praises, balance your hopes and fears, and gain an understanding of the times, enabling you and others to discern what you ought to do.

If the state of public affairs is bright and encouraging, wait upon God to carry on and perfect His own work. Do not rely on the wisdom or

strength of human instruments. If the situation is dark and discouraging, wait upon God to calm the fears of His people and to act on their behalf when their strength is gone. Even in the greatest successes of the church, when it appears to flourish under favourable circumstances, we must not consider it unnecessary to wait on God. Similarly, in its most challenging times, when its affairs seem at their lowest, we must not think it futile to wait on God; for while creatures cannot help without Him, He can help without them.

### **9. When you go on journeys, wait on God.**

Place yourselves under His protection, commit yourselves to His care, and depend on Him to command His angels concerning you, to bear you up as you travel and to guard you wherever you rest. Consider how much you owe to His providential care for all the comforts and conveniences you enjoy during your travels. It is He who has placed our lot in a land where we do not wander in a wilderness, like the deserts of Arabia, but have safe and well-trodden roads. Through His mercy, even in times of war, the highways are not deserted.

To Him we owe our safety—that the creatures serve us, that our journeys are preserved, and that when we travel, we are not exiled but can return home freely; and when we are home, we are not confined but have the liberty to go out.

At the start of your journey, lift your eyes to God: "Lord, go with me where I go." Travel under His shelter, trusting in His care through any dangers you face. Upon your return, acknowledge His goodness. Let all your bones say, "Lord, who is like unto Thee?" for He keeps all our bones, and not one of them is broken.

### **10. When you retreat into solitude, whether walking in the fields or resting in your closet, still wait on God.**

Maintain communion with Him even as you commune with your own heart. When you are alone, you need not truly be alone, for the Father is with you, and you can be with Him. Solitude can bring temptations, which require vigilance; Satan tempted our Saviour when He was alone in the wilderness. But solitude also offers opportunities—if we learn to use them—for devout and divine contemplation, the best kind of conversation.

In such moments, we may find ourselves never less alone than when alone. When we sit in silence, withdrawn from business and distractions, we have the opportunity to fill those quiet minutes with pious meditations on God and heavenly things. By doing so, we redeem the fragments of time that might otherwise be lost, and we are found waiting on God all the day.

**Secondly, let me offer some motives to persuade you to live a life of communion with God by waiting on Him all the day.**

**1. Consider that the eye of God is always upon you.**

When we are with our superiors and notice them watching us, it prompts us to pay attention to them. Shall we not then look up to God, whose eyes always behold, and whose eyelids test the children of men?

He sees all the movements of our hearts and takes pleasure in those movements of our hearts towards Him. This should encourage us to keep Him always before us.

A servant, though careless at other times, will remain attentive and diligent when under his master's watchful eye. How much more should we remain diligent, knowing that God is always watching? Let

us do our work with sincerity, not merely for human eyes, but for the eyes of our divine Master, whose gaze is constant.

**2. The God you are to wait on is the One with whom you have to do, *Hebrews 4:13*.**

"All things, even the thoughts and intents of the heart, are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." The phrase "with whom we have to do" (proV on hmin logoV) implies that we have business with Him, and He has business with us. It also suggests that we are accountable to Him, and there is an account to be kept.

We must each give an account of ourselves to Him, including every deed done in the body. This should move us to wait on Him daily, ensuring that through the blood of Christ, which balances our account, we remain reconciled with Him. If we reflected on how much we have to do with God each day, we would be more diligent and consistent in our attendance upon Him.

**3. The God we are to wait upon continually waits to be gracious to us.**

He is always doing us good, going before us with the blessings of His goodness, daily loading us with benefits. He seizes every opportunity to show His care when we are in danger, His provision when we are in need, and His comfort when we are in sorrow.

His providence watches over us all day, preserving our going out and coming in, *Psalms 121:8*, providing timely relief and support, and manifesting His presence on "the mount of the Lord." Even more, His grace waits on us throughout the day, supplying strength according to the day's demands and every situation we face.

Is God so ready to do us good, and shall we be slow or neglectful in serving Him?

**4. If we attend upon God, His holy angels will have charge to attend upon us.**

The angels are appointed as ministering spirits, serving for the benefit of those who will inherit salvation. They perform far more good offices for us each day than we are aware of.

What an honour and privilege it is to be served by holy angels—to be borne up in their arms, encircled by their protection. Their ministry is our defence against the malice of evil spirits. This is the privilege of all who wait upon God throughout the day.

**5. This life of communion with God and constant attendance upon Him is like a heaven on earth.**

It is the work of heaven and the will of God done on earth as it is in heaven, where the business of angels is to always behold the face of our Father.

Living in communion with God is a foretaste of the blessedness of heaven. It is a preparation for it and an introduction to it. It means having our conversation in heaven, from which we look for the Saviour. By looking for Him as our Saviour, we also look to Him as our Guide.

Through this practice, we show that our hearts are set on heaven. This gives us confidence to expect that we shall soon be there with Him.

**Thirdly, let me conclude with some directions for how you may wait on God all the day.**

1. **See much of God in every creature**—his wisdom and power in its creation and placement, and his goodness in its service to us. Look around you and observe the vast variety of wonders and abundance of comforts that surround you. Let all these things lead you to him, who is the fountain of being and the giver of every good thing; all our springs are in him, and from him flow all our streams. Recognising this will engage you to wait on him, for every creature is only what he makes it to be for us.

Thus, the very things that draw a worldly heart away from God will lead a gracious soul closer to him. Since all his works praise him, his saints will continually find occasion to bless him.

It is said that the pious Jews of old had the custom of giving glory to God whenever they took delight in any creature. When they smelled a flower, they would say, "Blessed be he who made this flower sweet." When they ate a morsel of bread, they would say, "Blessed be he who appointed bread to strengthen man's heart." If we likewise taste and see that the Lord is gracious in all things, and draw all satisfaction from the abundance of his bounty, we will be engaged to depend on him continually, just as a child is said to cling to its mother's breast.

2. **See that every creature is nothing without God.**

The more we recognise the vanity and emptiness of the world and all our enjoyments in it—their utter inability to make us truly happy—the closer we will cling to God. We will seek intimate communion with him to find in the Father of spirits the satisfaction we have sought in vain from the things of sense.

What folly it is to seek favour from creatures, waiting upon them as though they can truly help us, only to be sent away empty! Meanwhile, the Creator himself is rich in mercy to all who call upon him, full of goodness, free in his grace, and faithful to his promises.

Why should we trust in lying vanities and neglect the abundant mercies of God? Why rely on broken reeds when we have the Rock of Ages as the sure foundation of our hope? And why draw from broken cisterns when the God of all consolation stands ready to fill our souls with lasting joy?

### **3. Live by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.**

We cannot confidently wait on God except through a Mediator, for it is by his Son that God speaks to us and hears from us. All that passes between a holy and just God and poor sinners must go through the hands of that blessed Mediator who has laid his hand upon both. Every prayer we send to God and every mercy we receive from God comes through him.

It is through Christ, the anointed one, that God looks upon us, and through Christ that we behold the glory and grace of God shining. By Christ, we have access to God and find success in prayer. Therefore, we must make mention of his righteousness, and his alone.

In our habitual daily attendance upon God, we must also have an abiding dependence on Christ, who always appears in the presence of God for us. He continually gives his attention to introduce us to the Father. Let your heart rest on him as you wait upon God, for in him we have everything we need.

### **4. Be frequent and sincere in brief prayers.**

In waiting upon God, we must often speak to him and take every opportunity to do so. When we do not have the chance for a formal prayer, God will accept a brief, heartfelt cry if it comes from an honest heart. This is how David waited on God all day, as shown in verse 1: *Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.* To him, David directed his soul and all its holy desires and longings.

In such moments, we should ask for forgiveness for a specific sin, strength to resist a particular weakness, and victory over the temptations we face—and these requests will not be in vain. This is what it means to pray always and without ceasing. God does not measure prayers by their length or eloquence, but by the sincerity of the heart. Such prayers, even if brief or consisting of unspoken groanings too deep for words, will be accepted by him.

#### **5. Live each day as if it may be your last.**

At an hour we do not expect, the Son of Man will come. Therefore, no one can be certain in the morning that they will live to see the evening. We hear often of people being taken suddenly from this life. What kind of people, then, ought we to be? Surely, we must live in all holy conduct and godliness.

While it is not necessary to live as though we were certain that today would be our last day, it is wise to live as those who do not know whether it might be. Especially since we know that the day of the Lord will come—whether sooner or later—we are compelled to wait on him. And on whom else should frail, mortal creatures rely but on the eternal, living God?

Death will bring us all to God, to be judged by him; it will bring all the saints to him, to behold and delight in him fully. Since we are hastening towards him and hope to be with him forever, we have a responsibility to wait upon him now and to cultivate a close relationship with him. If we thought more about death, we would spend more time in communion with God. Our daily dying is a strong reason for our daily worship. Wherever we are, we must keep close to God, for we do not know where or when death will meet us.

This perspective transforms our understanding of death. Enoch, who walked with God, was taken up so that he did not see death; and

maintaining communion with God will provide us with what we need to face death and eternity beyond the grave. If we continue waiting on God every day and throughout the day, we will grow more experienced and, as a result, more skilled in the profound practice of communion with him. This will make our final days our best days, our last works our most fruitful works, and our final comforts our sweetest comforts.

In light of this, take the prophet's advice to heart: *Turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually* (Hosea 12:6).

## **The Third Discourse:**

### **Showing How to Close Every Day with God**

*I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.* (Psalm 4:8)

This verse may be understood either figuratively, referring to the soul's repose in the assurance of God's grace, or literally, referring to the body's rest under the protection of his providence. I prefer to embrace both interpretations, giving the Scripture its full meaning.

1. The Psalmist, having given priority to God's favour above any earthly good, having chosen it as his portion, expresses his great satisfaction in the choice he has made. While many others make

themselves restless with the fruitless question, “Who will show us any good?” and exhaust themselves chasing vanities, David finds complete peace by casting himself upon God’s good will. He prays, “Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.” Any good short of God’s favour cannot satisfy us, but his favour alone is enough, even without the world’s approval. The moon, stars, and all the artificial lights of the world cannot create a day without the sun; but the sun alone can make a day without them.

These were David’s sentiments, and they are shared by all the saints. Finding no rest in the defiled, flooded world, like Noah’s dove, he flies to the ark—the type of Christ—and declares, “Return unto thy rest, O my soul” (*unto thy Noah* is the phrase in the original, as Noah’s name means *rest*), *Psalms 116:7*.

If God lifts up the light of his countenance upon us, it not only fills us with holy joy—“putting gladness into the heart more than they have whose corn and wine increase” (verse 7)—but also settles us in holy rest. “I will now lay me down and sleep.” God is my God, and I am pleased; I am satisfied. I look no further, I desire no more. “I dwell in safety,” or, in confidence. Walking in the light of the Lord, I lack nothing, nor do I sense any deficiency. At the same time, I fear no evil, nor do I anticipate any danger. The Lord God is both my sun and my shield—a sun to enlighten and comfort me, and a shield to protect and defend me.

## **Lessons to Learn:**

Those who are assured of God’s favour can and should enjoy a holy serenity and security of mind. Both are promised together in the precious words of Isaiah 32:17:

*"And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."*

There is immediate satisfaction in doing what is right, and ultimately, there is quietness in the enjoyment of good and assurance in the freedom from evil.

**a. A holy serenity is one blessed fruit of God's favour.**

"I will now lay me down in peace and sleep." While we are under God's displeasure, or in doubt about his favour, how can we truly enjoy ourselves? Until this great matter is settled, the soul cannot be at rest. Does God have a controversy with you? Do not give sleep to your eyes or slumber to your eyelids until you have resolved the issue. Humble yourself and make sure of your friend—your best friend. *Proverbs 6:3: "Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend."*

When you have made peace with God and have clear assurance that you are accepted by him, then you may wisely and justly say what the carnal worldling foolishly said without reason: "*Soul, take thine ease;*" for in God, and in the covenant of grace, you have goods laid up for many years—goods laid up for eternity. *Luke 12:19: "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."*

Are your sins forgiven? Do you have an interest in Christ's mediation? Does God, through Christ, now accept your works? Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart. *Ecclesiastes 9:7: "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works."* Let this calm every storm and create peace in your soul.

When God is our covenant God, we have enough; indeed, we have everything. Though the gracious soul desires more of God, it never desires more than God. In him, it finds perfect contentment and rest. In him, it is at home, at peace. If we are satisfied with his loving-kindness—abundantly satisfied—there is enough to refresh the weary soul and fill every sorrowful heart. *Jeremiah 31:25*: “*For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.*” He fills the hungry with good things—indeed, the best things—and being filled, they can find rest forever, and their sleep here shall be sweet.

**b. A holy security is another blessed fruit of God’s favour.**

“Thou, Lord, makest me to dwell in safety.” When the light of God’s countenance shines upon me, I am safe, and I know I am safe. Therefore, I am at ease, for “*with thy favour wilt thou compass me as with a shield.*” *Psalms 5:12*: “*For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.*”

When I am under the protection of divine favour, even if a host of enemies encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. In this, I will be confident. *Psalms 27:3*: “*Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.*” Whatever God has promised me, I can trust and rest in, and that is enough to keep me secure, no matter what difficulties or dangers I face in fulfilling my duty.

Even if the earth itself is removed, we will not fear. *Psalms 46:2*: “*Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.*” We will fear no evil—not even in the valley of the shadow of death, in the territory of the king of terrors himself—because God is with us. “*For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*”

What the rich man imagines his wealth to be—a strong city and a high wall—is what the good man’s God truly is. *Proverbs 18:10-11*: “*The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.*” The Almighty will be your gold and your defence. *Job 22:25*: “*Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver.*”

Nothing is more dangerous than feeling secure in a sinful way, and people crying, "Peace, peace," to themselves while they remain under the ruling power of a vain and carnal mind. Oh, that sinners who are at ease would be made to tremble! Nothing is more foolish than placing our security on the world and its promises, for they are all vanity and a lie. But nothing is more reasonable, or more advantageous to us, than for godly people to confidently build on the promises of a good God. For those who remain on the path of duty, it is possible to be quiet and free from the fear of evil—knowing no true evil shall befall them, no real harm, nothing that will not ultimately work for their good. Such people know that while they remain loyal to God as their King, they are under his protection—the protection of Omnipotence itself—which allows them to defy all malign powers. “*If God be for us, who can be against us?*”

Even the heathen recognised that every honest, virtuous person could lay claim to a kind of security. The poet Horace famously described it: *Integer vitae scelerisque purus*—“An upright man, free of guilt, needs no weapon to defend himself.” Such a man could remain fearless even if the world collapsed around him. How much more should Christians, who hold fast to their integrity, lay claim to this confidence! For “*who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?*”

## **1. It is the privilege of good people to enjoy this holy serenity and security of mind.**

This peace of mind is not only allowed to the righteous—it is promised to them. God assures his people that he will speak peace to his saints, fill them with joy and peace in believing, and guard their hearts and minds with his peace. His peace keeps them safe and calm. Furthermore, God has provided a method by which his people may obtain this promised serenity. The Scriptures were written so that their joy may be full, and so that through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures, they may have hope. The ordinances of worship are instituted as wells of salvation, from which believers may draw water with joy. Ministers are appointed to be comforters and helpers of their joy. This is how willing God has been to show the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, so they may have strong consolation. *Hebrews 6:17-18: “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation.”*

## **2. It is the duty of good people to strive for this holy security and serenity of mind.**

We must use the means God has appointed to obtain it. Do not give in to Satan’s disquieting suggestions or the tormenting doubts and fears that rise in your soul. Strive for peace. Chide yourself for your lack of trust and command yourself to believe and hope in God so

that you may yet praise him. If you feel uncertain about your standing, do as Paul's sailors did—cast anchor and wait for the day.

Trembling Christian, who is tossed by tempests and without comfort, try to lay yourself down in peace and sleep. Calm yourself into a peaceful and steady frame. In the name of him whom the winds and seas obey, command your troubled thoughts to be still and say, "Peace, be still." Rest your aching, trembling head where the beloved disciple laid his—on the bosom of the Lord Jesus. Or, if you do not yet feel bold enough to draw so near, lay your trembling head at his feet, surrendering yourself entirely to him. Say, "If I perish, I will perish here." Place yourself in his hands with total confidence in his love and care. Submit to his work and will, trusting him to speak peace to your heart.

If you have not yet entered the promised rest—the *sabbatism*—that remains for the people of God, view it as a land of promise. Though it may tarry, wait for it. *"For the vision is yet for an appointed time... though it tarry, wait for it."* Hebrews 4:9: *"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."* Habakkuk 2:3: *"For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."* Light is sown for the righteous, and what is sown shall come up in a harvest of joy.

### **3. The Psalmist's example: ending the day in communion with God.**

Having finished the day's work, perhaps worn out by it, David retires to rest. After offering good advice to others—to commune with their hearts on their beds and offer the sacrifices of righteousness—he

himself concludes the day with these words: *“I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep.” Psalm 4:8 : “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.”*

This passage should be understood literally, just as the disciples interpreted their Master when he said, *“Lazarus sleepeth,”* referring to rest in sleep. *John 11:12-13: “Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.”* Here, we see David’s pious reflection as he prepares for bed. Just as he awakens with thoughts of God, so he ends his day in sweet communion with him.

It seems David penned this Psalm during a time of distress and persecution by his enemies—perhaps on the same occasion as the previous Psalm, when he fled from Absalom, his son. Externally, there were battles, and internally, no wonder there were fears. Yet even in such circumstances, he places such confidence in God’s protection that he goes to bed at his usual time, with his usual peace and cheerfulness, composing himself as on any other occasion. He knows his enemies have no power over him except what is given to them from above, and that even this power is under God’s check and restraint. Their power will not be allowed to go so far as to cause him any real harm. Therefore, David retreats into the secret place of the Most High, abides under the shadow of the Almighty, and remains calm in his own heart. What breaks a worldly person’s heart will not break a godly person’s sleep. “Let them do their worst,” says David, “I will lay me down and sleep; the will of the Lord be done.”

Now observe here:

## **a. David’s confidence in God**

*“Thou, Lord, makest me to dwell in safety.”* Not only does God make him safe, but God also assures him of this safety, giving him peace and confidence. The phrase conveys a sense of walking securely, as in *Proverbs 10:9*: *“He that walketh uprightly walketh surely.”* Just as the upright man walks boldly, so David goes boldly to his bed.

Unlike the men of Laish, who lived carelessly (*Judges 18:7*, David dwells securely in God, like the sons of Zion in their solemn city. As described in *Isaiah 33:20*: *“Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation.”*

One word in the text is particularly noteworthy: *“Thou, Lord, only dost secure me.”*

Some interpret this to mean David finds security even when he is alone. When he has no advisers to counsel him or guards to protect him, he is still unafraid, knowing God is with him. The Son of David, Jesus, found comfort in a similar truth. When all his disciples forsook him, leaving him alone, he said, *“Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”* (*John 16:32*).

Many people, especially those who are weak, feel afraid when alone, particularly in the dark. But a firm belief in God’s presence in all places, and in his divine protection of the righteous, would quiet such fears and even make us ashamed of them.

Moreover, being alone in the sense of being “set apart” for God’s purposes can itself be a source of security. As mentioned earlier in *verse 8*, being a people whom God has set apart for himself offers unique protection. A sober distinctiveness becomes a source of safety and satisfaction—just as Noah’s righteousness was in a corrupt world. Israel is described as a people dwelling alone, not counted among the nations (*Numbers 23:9*), and it is said, *“Israel then shall*

*dwell in safety alone” (Deuteronomy 33:28). The more we live in spiritual separation from the world, the more securely we dwell.*

Our translation, however, attributes this directly to God: *“Thou alone makest me to dwell safely.”* It is God alone who secures us. While God sometimes uses instruments to protect his people, he does not depend on them. *“The earth helped the woman,”* but God can work without such help. When all other supports fail, God’s own arm brings salvation. *Deuteronomy 32:12: “So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.”*

This is not all. David depends entirely on God for his security. He is at ease, not because of any earthly hosts or armies, but purely because he has the Lord of Hosts on his side.

## **b. Trusting God for both past and future safety**

*“Thou makest me to dwell in safety.”* This statement can be understood to look backward, forward, or both.

- **Looking backward:** David acknowledges God’s protection during the day, expressing thankfulness for the mercies he has received. He recognises that *“the sun has not smitten me by day”* and gives thanks for God’s care.
- **Looking forward:** David trusts God to protect him through the night, confident that *“the moon shall not smite me by night.”* Here, he expresses his dependence on God for further mercies.

These two attitudes—gratitude for past deliverance and trust for future care—should always go together. Our eyes must be fixed on

God, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. *“Who was, and is, and is to come.”*

David’s confidence is grounded in God’s faithfulness across time: *“Who has delivered, and doth deliver, and in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.”* (2 Corinthians 1:10).

**2. His calmness within himself, drawn from his confidence in God:** *“I will both lay me down and sleep.” Simul, or pariter in pace cubabo* (“At the same time, or likewise, I will lie down in peace”).

Those who have an abundance of worldly wealth and pleasures—such as those whose corn and wine are increasing—may lie down and sleep contentedly, like Boaz, who slept at the end of a heap of corn (*Ruth 3:7*). But even though David lacks such worldly advantages, he declares that he can lie down and sleep in peace just as contentedly.

The text connects his lying down with his sleeping: *“I will not only lay me down, as one seeking composure, but I will also sleep, as one who has truly found it.”* Some interpret this to suggest that he falls asleep as soon as he lies down, being weary from the work of the day and free from any disturbing thoughts that might otherwise keep him awake.

These words are meant to be our guide when we retire at night. We should take care to live throughout the day—especially as it draws towards evening—in such a way that we are prepared for our evening devotions. Our hearts should not be overburdened, whether on one hand with indulgence and drunkenness, as is often the case with those who live for pleasure, or on the other hand with the cares of this life, as frequently happens with those engrossed in business. Instead, we should exercise discipline over both our thoughts and

time, ensuring that we finish the day's work well. This serves as a foretaste of finishing our life's work well—and all is truly well when it ends everlastingly well.

**Doctrine: As we should begin the day with God and wait upon him throughout the day, so we should also strive to close it with him.**

To explain this duty of closing the day with God, and doing so in a good frame of mind, I can think of no better approach than to follow the structure of the text, highlighting David's example and applying it to our own lives.

**I. First, let us retire to rest.**

Nature requires rest just as it requires food. Humanity goes forth to work and labour, but this continues only until evening. When the day's work is done, it is time to lie down.

We read of Ishbosheth, who lay on his bed at noon but met death there (*2 Samuel 4:5-6*). Similarly, David arose from his bed at evening time but fell into sin—a worse fate than death (*2 Samuel 11:2*). We must work while it is day, as long as we have the opportunity to do the work of him who sent us. The night, when no one can work, is the appropriate and appointed time to rest.

It is promised in *Zephaniah 2:7* : “*They shall lie down in the evening.*” We should embrace this promise, resting when it is time to rest and avoiding the practice of turning day into night and night into day, as so many do for ill reasons.

## **A. Some stay up to commit mischief against their neighbours.**

Some stay awake at night to kill, steal, and destroy. As described in *Job 24:16*: “*In the dark, they dig through houses which they had marked for themselves in the daytime.*” David also laments about his enemies in *Psalms 59:6*: “*At evening, they go round about the city.*” Those who do evil hate the light. Judas Iscariot, the traitor, sought Jesus with his band of men when he should have been in his bed.

The wickedness of such people is further aggravated by the effort they expend on evil. They are so consumed by their malicious designs that they cannot sleep unless they have caused harm (*Proverbs 4:16*).

In contrast, how shameful it is for those who claim to live for good that they cannot sacrifice some personal gratification to pursue it. A Latin writer put it this way:

*"In order that they may murder men, robbers rise up by night, and do you not awaken so that you may protect yourself?"*

Say, then, *"While others stay awake looking for opportunities to do harm, I will lie down, be quiet, and ensure I harm no one."*

## **B. Others stay up in pursuit of the world and its wealth.**

They not only rise up early, but they also stay up late, eagerly pursuing their covetous practices (*Psalms 127:2*), and either to gain or to save, they deny themselves the most necessary sleep. This behaviour is folly, as it deprives them of the comfortable enjoyment of what they already have—an enjoyment that is the ultimate goal—while pretending to care and work harder to obtain more, which is

merely the means. Solomon speaks of those who "neither day nor night sleep with their eyes" (*Ecclesiastes 8:16*), who make themselves slaves and drudges to the world, which is one of the cruelest taskmasters. In doing so, they make that which is vanity itself into vexation of spirit. They weary themselves in pursuit of every vanity (*Habakkuk 2:13*), and are so miserably in love with their chains that they deny themselves not only the spiritual rest that God has provided for them as the God of grace, but also the natural rest which, as the God of nature, he has ordained. This denial is a vivid example of the harm sinners do to their own bodies as well as their souls.

Let us see the folly of such behaviour and avoid labouring for the food that perishes, and for the abundance that deprives the rich man of sleep. Instead, let us labour for the food that endures to eternal life—the grace that is the guarantee of glory—whose abundance will make our sleep sweet and refreshing.

**C. Others stay up indulging their pleasures.** They refuse to lie down at an appropriate time because they cannot bring themselves to leave their vain entertainments—their music, dancing, plays, cards, and dice—or, worse still, their indulgence in rioting and excess, for "those that are drunk are drunk in the night." It is bad enough when such gratifications, whether of base lusts or of vain minds, consume the whole evening, engrossing their souls entirely. They insensibly leave neither time nor inclination for evening devotions, whether private or with their families. But it is much worse when such indulgence continues late into the night, for then it inevitably encroaches on the following morning, stealing the time that should also be devoted to the exercises of religion.

Those who choose, with so much pleasure, to stay up until the early hours of the morning to, as they say, "have a merry night of it"—spending their time in filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting, which are not fitting—would consider it unreasonable if they were asked to spend even half an hour past their usual bedtime engaged in any good duties. Such people would have criticised the apostle Paul himself as "long-winded" and indiscreet for continuing his speech until midnight on a special occasion (*Acts 20:7*). Yet, they would be equally reluctant to, like David, rise at midnight to give thanks to God, or, like their Master, spend an entire night in prayer.

Let those corrupt affections, which lead to such excess and transgression, be mortified and not gratified. Those who have allowed themselves such irregularities, if they take the time for honest self-reflection, cannot fail to see the harm these behaviours have caused to the prosperity of their souls. Therefore, they should resolve to deny themselves for their own spiritual well-being.

One rule for ending the day well is to keep to good hours: everything is beautiful in its proper time. I have heard it said long ago, and I humbly repeat it now:

**Early to bed, and early to rise,  
Is the way to be healthy, and wealthy, and wise.**

Let us take it as understood that unless some necessary business, a work of mercy, or an exceptional act of devotion keeps you awake beyond your usual time, you are inclined to retire to rest. When we do lie down, let us do so with thankfulness to God and thoughts of our own mortality; with penitent reflections on the sins of the day; and with humble prayers for the mercies of the night.

# **1. Let us lie down with thankfulness to God.**

When we retire to our bedrooms or private spaces, we should lift our hearts to God, the God of our mercies, and make him the object of our praises every time we go to bed. We surely have no lack of reasons to give thanks if we are not lacking a thankful heart. Let us then engage in this pleasant duty, this work that is its own reward. The evening sacrifice was always meant to be a sacrifice of praise.

## **a. We have reason to be thankful for the many mercies of the past day, which we ought to review specifically.**

Let us say, “Blessed be the Lord who daily loads us with benefits.” Observe the constant flow of mercies, uninterrupted and unbroken day after day. Consider the particular instances of mercy that have made some days remarkable and memorable. It is God who has granted us life and favour; it is his visitation that preserves our spirits.

Reflect on the many calamities we are preserved from each day—the dangers we are aware of and perhaps have narrowly escaped, as well as those we were not even conscious of. Think, too, of the judgments we deserve yet have been spared from, many of which others, better than we, now endure. Let all our bones say, “Lord, who is like unto thee?” For it is God who keeps all our bones so that not one of them is broken. Truly, it is because of his mercies that we are not consumed.

Now think of the many comforts that surround us daily, for which we owe everything to God’s providence. Every bite of food we eat, every

sip we drink is a mercy. Every step we take and every breath we draw is mercy. All the joy we find in the love and kindness of our family, the companionship and helpfulness of friends, the success in our work, and the pleasure we find in it—all of this comes from God's hand. Whether it is Zebulun rejoicing in his going out or Issachar enjoying peace in his tents, let us acknowledge it all with gratitude and to the praise of God.

Even if the day has not passed without some difficulty or disappointment, we must not let that hinder our praise. Whatever has happened, God is still good. It is our duty to give thanks in every situation and to bless the name of the Lord when he takes away, as well as when he gives. Our afflictions are few and deserved a thousand times over; our mercies are many and forfeited a thousand times over.

**b. We have reason to be thankful for the coming of evening, which calls us to rest and lie down.**

The same wisdom, power, and goodness that makes the morning also makes the evening rejoice. We should be grateful for the closing of the curtains of the night, which grant us rest, just as we are for the opening of the eyelids of morning, which call us to our labours. When God divided light from darkness and appointed their respective times, he saw that it was good. In a world of mixtures and changes, nothing could be more fitting.

Let us give thanks, then, to the God who forms the light and creates the darkness. Let us trust that in the cycles of time, as well as in the cycles of life's events, the darkness of affliction may be just as necessary for us in its season as the light of prosperity. If the worker

longs for the shadow of evening to come, let him be thankful when it does, for the burden and heat of the day are not perpetual.

**c. We have reason to be thankful for a quiet place to lie down in.**

We are not driven out from among people, as Nebuchadnezzar was, to lie down with the beasts of the field. Though we were born like the wild ass's colt, yet we do not have, like the wild ass, the wilderness for our habitation, or a desolate and barren land for our dwelling. We are not forced to wander in deserts and mountains, hiding in dens and caves of the earth, as many of God's dear saints and servants have had to do—of whom the world was not worthy. Instead, the good Shepherd makes us lie down in green pastures.

Let us also be grateful that we do not have, as Jacob did, the cold ground for a bed and a stone for a pillow, which even so, one would gladly accept if it came with the comfort of Jacob's dream.

**d. We have reason to be thankful that we are not forced to sit up.**

Our Master not only allows us to lie down but also ensures that nothing prevents us from doing so. Many go to bed but cannot lie down due to painful or debilitating illnesses that make lying down impossible to endure. Our bodies are made of the same frail mould, and it is by the Lord's mercies that we are not afflicted in this way.

Many are kept up at night by sickness in their families—perhaps their children are unwell, and they must tend to them. If God removes sickness from among us and keeps it at bay so that no plague comes near our dwellings, even in a large household where

everyone remains well, this is a mercy we ought to value and thank God for. Such a blessing should be appreciated in proportion to the great affliction endured where sickness prevails.

Some are kept awake by fear—fear of enemies, soldiers, or thieves. The head of the household may watch through the night to prevent intruders from breaking in. Yet we are not kept from lying down, nor is our rest disturbed by the alarms of war. We are delivered from the noise of archers in our places of rest. Therefore, we should recount the righteous acts of the Lord, even his righteous acts towards the inhabitants of peaceful villages in Israel, who, under his protection, are as safe as those living in walled cities with gates and bars.

When we lie down, let us thank God that we are able to do so.

## **2. Let us lie down with thoughts of death and of the great change that we must undergo at death.**

The end of each day should remind us of the conclusion of all our days—when our night comes, our long night, which will bring an end to our work and lead the honest labourer both to take his rest and to receive his reward. It is good for us to think frequently of death, to reflect on it each time we go to bed. Such thoughts will help to mortify the corruptions of our hearts, which burden us daily; to guard us against the temptations of the world, which are our daily snares; to loosen our attachment to daily comforts, and to make us more patient under daily crosses and fatigues. Thinking often of death—and thinking of it as going to bed—can help us rise above the fear of it.

**a. At death, we shall retire, as we do at bedtime.**

We shall go into privacy for a while, until the great day of public appearance: "Man lieth down, and riseth not till the heavens be no more; they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep," **Job 14:12**. Now, during the day, we go out to see and be seen, and some spend their whole lives on nothing higher than such fleeting purposes. But when death comes, this will end. We shall no longer see the world—"I shall behold man no more," **Isaiah 38:11**—and the world shall no longer see us—"The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more," **Job 7:8**. We shall be hidden in the grave and cut off from the land of the living.

To die is to bid goodnight to all our friends, ending our conversations with them. Though we bid farewell, thanks be to God, it is not an eternal farewell. We hope to meet them again in the morning of the resurrection, never to part again.

**b. At death, we shall put off the body, as we put off our clothes when going to bed.**

The soul is the essence of the person; the body is merely clothing. At death, we shall be unclothed. "The earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved," and the garment of the body shall be laid aside. Death strips us, sending us naked out of the world as we came into it. It removes all disguises in which we appeared before men so that we may stand naked and open before God. Our grave clothes are, in a sense, nightclothes.

When we are weary, hot, and burdened, we eagerly remove our clothes at night for rest. Similarly, "we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened," but when death releases the soul from the

encumbrance of the body, how much easier will it be! Let us then look forward to putting off the body at death as willingly as we look forward to undressing at night. Be as unattached to the body as we are to our clothes, and take comfort in the thought that though we are unclothed at death, if we are clothed with Christ and his grace, we will not be found naked. Instead, we shall be clothed with immortality. We have new garments being prepared for us, which we shall put on in the morning—a glorious body, like Christ's, replacing the vile body we now have.

**c. At death, we shall lie down in the grave, just as we lie down in bed.**

The grave is our resting place. "His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust," **Job 20:11**. For those who die in sin, unrepentant, the grave is a dungeon. Their iniquities lie with them and make it so. But for those who die in Christ and in faith, the grave is a bed of rest. There are no tossings and turnings until dawn, as there sometimes are even in the most comfortable beds of this world. In the grave, there is no fear of being disturbed by dreams or terrifying visions of the night. There is no pain, no chastening on that bed, nor strong agony in the bones.

It is the privilege of those who walk uprightly in life that when they die, they "enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds," **Isaiah 57:2**.

Holy Job comforted himself in his suffering with the knowledge that he would soon "make his bed in the darkness" and find rest there. For believers, the grave is a fragrant bed—filled with roses and spices—because of him who lay there before us, the one who is the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys.

Say then of your grave, as you do of your bed at night: there the weary are at rest—with this further consolation, that you shall not only rest there but rise again shortly, abundantly refreshed; you shall be called up to meet the beloved of your soul and to be with him forever. You shall rise to a day that will not renew your cares, as every day on earth does, but will instead secure for you unmixed and everlasting joys. How comfortably may we lie down at night if such thoughts as these accompany us? And how comfortably may we lie down at death if we have accustomed ourselves to such thoughts as these.

### **3. Let us lie down with penitent reflections upon the sins of the day past.**

Praising God and delighting in him is such pleasant work, and so much the work of angels, that it seems a pity we should have anything else to do. But the truth is, we make other work for ourselves by our own folly—work that, while not as pleasant, is absolutely necessary, and that is repentance. While we are at night rejoicing in God's goodness, we must also intermix with that the affliction of ourselves for our own badness. Both must have their place in us, and they will harmonise well together, for we must take up our work as it comes before us.

#### **a. We must be convinced that we are continually contracting guilt.**

We carry corrupt natures within us, bitter roots that produce gall and wormwood, and everything we say or do is tainted by them. In many things, we all offend; "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." We are in the midst of a defiling world and

cannot keep ourselves entirely unspotted from it. If we say we have no sin, or that we have passed a day without sinning, we deceive ourselves. If we truly examine ourselves, we shall find reason to cry out, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse us from secret faults"—faults that even we are not aware of.

We ought to aim for sinless perfection, with as much vigilance as if we could achieve it. But even so, we must acknowledge that we fall short, that we have not yet attained it, nor are we already perfect. This is revealed by our constant sad experience, for it is certain we do enough wrong every day to bring us to our knees at night.

**b. We must examine our consciences to uncover the specific transgressions of the day.**

Every night, let us search and try our ways—our thoughts, words, and actions—comparing them with the rule of God’s word. Let us look at ourselves in that mirror so that we may see our blemishes and make specific acknowledgements of them. It is good to ask ourselves: What have I done today? What have I done wrong? What duty have I neglected? What missteps have I taken? How have I conducted myself in my work and relationships? Have I fulfilled the duties of my particular roles? Have I submitted to God’s will in every circumstance of providence?

By doing this regularly, we shall grow in self-awareness, and nothing will contribute more to the prosperity of our souls.

**c. We must renew our repentance for whatever we find has been amiss in us.**

We must be sorry for our sins, sincerely lament them, and take shame upon ourselves for committing them. Let us give glory to God by confessing them. If we recognise that something in particular has gone wrong, it must be specifically mourned. But in general, we must also humble ourselves for our daily sins of infirmity. We should not treat these lightly because they happen daily; rather, we should be all the more ashamed of them and of the corrupt heart from which they flow.

It is good to renew our repentance promptly before the heart becomes hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Delaying repentance is dangerous; wounds that are treated quickly may be healed with ease, but if they become foul and corrupt—as the Psalmist laments, **Psalm 38:5**—then it is our fault, and the cure becomes more difficult. Though we fall into sin daily through the weakness of our flesh, if we rise again each night through renewed repentance, we are not, nor should we consider ourselves, utterly cast down. The sin that humbles us will not ruin us.

**d. We must make a fresh application of the blood of Christ to our souls for the remission of our sins and the gracious acceptance of our repentance.**

We must not think that we need Christ only at our first conversion to God. No, we have daily need of him as our advocate with the Father, and therefore, as such, he always appears in the presence of God for us and continually attends to this very thing. Even our sins of daily infirmity would lead to our ruin if he had not made satisfaction for them and did not still make intercession for us. He that is washed still needs to wash his feet from the filth he collects with every step. Blessed be God, there is a fountain opened for us to wash in, and it is always open.

**e. We must apply ourselves to the throne of grace for peace and pardon.**

Those who repent must pray that the thought of their heart may be forgiven them, **Acts 8:22**. It is good to be specific in our prayers for the pardon of sin, so that, as Hannah said concerning Samuel, "For this child I prayed," we may also be able to say, "For the forgiveness of this I prayed." However, the publican's general prayer is always a very suitable one for each of us to use as we lie down: **God, be merciful to me, a sinner.**

#### **4. Let us lie down with humble supplications for the mercies of the night.**

Prayer is as necessary in the evening as it is in the morning, for we have the same need of divine favour and care to make the evening's close as joyful as the morning's beginning.

**a. We must pray that our outward man may be under the care of God's holy angels, who are the ministers of his providence.**

God has promised that he will give his angels charge over those who make the Most High their refuge, and that they shall pitch their tents around them and deliver them. What he has promised, we may and must pray for—not as though God requires the service of angels or relinquishes his own care of his people by entrusting it to them, but because Scripture repeatedly affirms that angels are employed in protecting God's people, whom he takes under his special care. Though angels are not seen, their ministry honours God, who

commands them, and honours the saints, whom they are charged to protect.

It was the glory of Solomon's bed that sixty valiant men surrounded it, all armed with swords because of fear in the night, **Song of Solomon 3:7-8**. But how much more honourable and comforting is the protection of true believers, who, though they may lie in the humblest conditions, have hosts of angels surrounding their beds! Through the ministry of these good spirits, believers are preserved from the malice of evil spirits. Yet God has ordained that we must ask for this protection; as he said to the house of Israel, he will be sought after to perform his promises. Even Christ himself prayed to the Father, who was ready to send legions of angels to his aid, **Matthew 26:53**. How much more should we ask, that it may be granted to us?

**b. We must pray that our inward man may be under the influence of his Holy Spirit, who is the author and source of all grace.**

Just as public worship is an opportunity for the Spirit to work upon our hearts, and thus we must pray for the Spirit's presence when we attend public ordinances, so too must we pray for the Spirit's influence in our private devotions. The Scriptures tell us that during slumberings upon the bed, God opens the ears of men and seals their instruction, **Job 33:15-16**. David himself experienced this: he testified that God visited him at night, tried him, and revealed his heart to him, **Psalms 17:3**. He also found that God gave him counsel, and that his innermost thoughts instructed him during the night, **Psalms 16:7**. David cherished the night as a season for remembering God and meditating upon him.

To make the best use of this special season for private communion with God, we must earnestly pray for the gracious and powerful influences of the Holy Spirit, placing ourselves under his guidance and submitting to his will. We cannot fully understand how God's grace may work upon us while we sleep. The soul can act in some ways independently of the body, and while the senses are locked in slumber, the Spirit of the Lord is never bound. Therefore, we have good reason to pray not only that our minds will be kept from being disturbed or defiled by evil dreams (in which, for all we know, evil spirits may play a role) but that they may instead be instructed and calmed by good dreams, which some, like Plutarch, regard as signs of spiritual progress and virtue. We know that the good Spirit of God can influence such dreams.

I have even heard of a godly man who prayed at night specifically for good dreams. Whether such prayers are directly answered or not, they reflect a pious heart seeking to be kept close to God, even during the hours of rest.

## **II. Secondly, When we lie down, our care and effort must be to lie down in peace.**

It is promised to Abraham that he shall go to his grave in peace, **Genesis 15:15**, and this promise is certain for all his spiritual offspring, for the end of the upright man is peace. Josiah dies in peace, even though he is killed in battle. As a foretaste of this, let us lie down in peace every night. It is threatened to the wicked that they shall lie down in sorrow, **Isaiah 1:11**. It is promised to the righteous that they shall lie down, and no one will make them afraid, **Leviticus 26:6, Job 11:19**. Let us then enter into this rest, this blessed sabbath-like rest, and ensure that we do not fall short of it.

## **A. Let us lie down in peace with God.**

Without peace with God, there can be no true peace. “There is no peace,” says my God, “to the wicked,” for God is at war with them. A state of sin is a state of enmity against God. Those who remain in that state are under the wrath and curse of God and cannot lie down in peace. What right have they to peace? Hurry, sinner, hurry to make peace with God through Jesus Christ, by repentance and faith. Take hold of his strength so that you may make peace with him, and you shall make peace, for fury is not in him. The terms of peace are offered—accept them. Reconcile yourself with Christ, who is our peace, on his terms, on any terms. Do not delay. Do not dare to sleep in a state in which you would not dare to die. Escape for your life; do not look back. Acquaint yourself with him now, immediately, and be at peace. In this way, good will come to you, and you will lie down in peace.

Sin constantly causes strife between God and our souls. It provokes God against us and alienates us from him. Therefore, we need to make peace with God every night. Let us reconcile ourselves to him and his holy will through the work of his Spirit in us, and plead with him to reconcile himself to us through the intercession of his Son. In this way, there will be no distance, no estrangement between us and God—no cloud to block his mercies from coming down upon us or our prayers from rising to him. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This enables us not only to lie down in peace but also to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Let this be our first priority—that God has no quarrel with us, nor we with him.

## **B. Let us lie down in peace with all men.**

We must go to bed with peace in our hearts towards others, just as we must face death with a spirit of charity. Those who interact much with the world may scarcely pass a day without encountering something provoking—some slight, some offence, or some injury, or at least something they perceive as such. When we retire at night and reflect on these events, we are tempted to magnify the offence. While we dwell on it, our anger burns, and resentment rises, leading us to thoughts of retaliation: “I will do to him as he has done to me,” **Proverbs 24:29**. This is when anger hardens into malice, and revenge begins to take root. Therefore, let wisdom and grace intervene to quench this fire before it grows. Let us uproot and destroy this bitterness and instead cultivate a spirit of forgiveness. Resolve to pardon the injury, to think charitably of the offender, and to wish them well.

Even if others are inclined to quarrel with us, let us determine not to quarrel with them. Whatever offence or injury has been done, let us resolve that it will neither disturb our peace nor cause us to fret, as Peninnah intended to provoke Hannah to do, **1 Samuel 1:6**. Neither let it sour our spirits or embitter us, making us petty or spiteful. Instead, let us love ourselves and our neighbours as ourselves. By harbouring malice, we harm not only our neighbour but also ourselves. Forgiving twenty injuries is easier and far more rewarding than avenging one.

Particularly at night, let it be our aim to reconcile ourselves to those who have wronged us. This is implied in the command, **Ephesians 4:26**: “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” If your anger has not cooled by evening, let it be extinguished before the sun sets, disappearing with the fading light. When you lie down with unresolved anger or resentment, your soul is like one among lions. You lie down on a bed of thorns, among scorpions. Some have even

observed from the following verse, **Ephesians 4:27**: “Neither give place to the devil,” that those who go to bed harbouring malice invite the devil to be their bedfellow.

We cannot lie down in peace with God unless we are at peace with others. We cannot sincerely pray to be forgiven unless we forgive. Let us, therefore, pursue peace with all men, as far as it depends on us. By seeking peace, we secure peace for our own spirits. Let us live as those who say, “I am for peace,” even though others may be for war.

**C. Let us lie down in peace with ourselves, with our minds, and with a sweet composure of spirit, enjoying a sense of inner tranquillity. Return to your rest, O my soul, and be at ease; let nothing disturb your soul, your cherished inner self.**

But when may we lie down in peace at night?

**1. If by God’s grace we have, to some degree, accomplished the work of the day and filled it with duty, we may then lie down in peace at night.**

If our conscience testifies that, in simplicity and godly sincerity—not with worldly wisdom but by God’s grace—we have conducted ourselves in the world today, and if we have done some good in our respective roles, something that will count for eternity, then we can rest. If our hearts do not reproach us with a *diem perdidit* (“I wasted the day”), or worse, that we have spent the day serving sin instead of

God, then we may rest. However, if, by contrast, we have walked with God, lived in reverence to him, and waited on him all day long, we may lie down in peace, for God's word declares, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Indeed, the sleep of the labouring Christian is sweet—very sweet—when they can say, "I am one day's journey closer to my end and one day's work more prepared for it."

Nothing makes our bedrooms more pleasant or our beds more comfortable than the testimony of the Spirit of God, assuring us that we are progressing towards heaven, along with a conscience kept void of offence. This is not only a continual feast but also a continual rest.

**2. If, by faith, patience, and submission to God's will, we have reconciled ourselves to the day's events and are no longer troubled by anything God has allowed, we may lie down in peace at night.**

Whatever difficulties or disappointments we have faced shall not embitter us. Instead, we must accept God's discipline, take up our cross, and say, "All that God does is well done." By maintaining patience, we keep control of our souls and refuse to let affliction unseat our peace.

Perhaps we have faced setbacks in farming, business, or at sea, or maybe debtors have failed us, or creditors have been harsh. Yet we must say, "This too comes from the Lord." Every circumstance is under God's providential hand, and every creature is what God makes it to be. Therefore, we must say with the psalmist, "I am silent; I will not open my mouth, for it is you who have done this." What pleases God should not displease us.

**3. If we have renewed our repentance for sin and made a fresh application of the blood of Christ to cleanse our consciences, we may then lie down in peace.**

Nothing disrupts peace like sin—it is the intruder that troubles the soul. But when sin is forgiven and dealt with, no evil can disturb us. Even the inhabitant who is unwell will not say, “I am sick,” because the people who dwell there will have their iniquities forgiven, **Isaiah 33:24**. The pardon of sin is sufficient to outweigh all our sorrows and silence all our complaints.

For instance, a man with a paralysed body still has every reason to be at peace and even to rejoice if Christ says to him, “Your sins are forgiven,” and, “I am your salvation.”

**4. If we have placed ourselves under God’s divine protection for the coming night, we may then lie down in peace.**

If, through faith and prayer, we have run to the name of the Lord as our strong tower and taken shelter under the shadow of his wings, making him our refuge and habitation, then we may speak peace to ourselves, for God’s word speaks peace to us.

When David said, **Psalm 57:1**, “In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge,” he may have been referring to the cherubim, between which God was said to dwell. However, it is equally likely that he was drawing from the imagery of Christ, who compared himself to a hen gathering her chicks under her wings. This picture is echoed in **Psalm 91:4**: “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust.” Just as the chicks under the hen’s

wings are not only safe but also warm and content, so are we under God's care.

**5. If we have cast all our cares for the coming day upon God, we may then lie down in peace.**

Worrying about tomorrow is a great hindrance to peace at night. If we learn to live without anxiety and entrust the outcomes of all things to God—who can and will do what is best for those who love and fear him—then we can rest. We should say, “Father, thy will be done,” and so find ease.

Our Saviour earnestly taught his disciples not to be anxious about what they would eat, drink, or wear, because their heavenly Father already knew their needs and would provide for them. Let us also rid ourselves of such burdens by casting them upon God, who cares for us. Why should both he and we carry the same concerns? Let him carry the load, for he is able, and then we may rest.

**III. Thirdly, Having laid ourselves down in peace, we must prepare ourselves to sleep.**

"I will lay me down and sleep." The love of sleep for its own sake is the mark of a sluggard, but as it is nature's remedy for restoring its weary powers, it should be regarded as a mercy equal to that of food, and in its proper time, received with thankfulness.

And with such thoughts as these, we may go to sleep:

**A. What frail bodies we carry about with us, that so frequently require rest and relief, and tire so easily, even from doing little or nothing.**

It is a privilege of humanity, above the beasts, that we are made to walk upright—*Os homini sublime dedit* ["He gave to man the ability to stand upright"]—and part of the serpent's curse was, "on thy belly shalt thou go." Yet we have little reason to boast of this honour when we realise how briefly we can stand upright before we are burdened by this very honour and forced to lie down. The powers of the soul and the senses of the body are indeed our glory, but it is humbling to reflect on how, after just a few hours of use, they must all be rendered inactive, entirely unable to function, and that this rest is necessary.

Let not the wise person glory in their wisdom, or the strong person in their strength, when they must spend a quarter of their time utterly bereft of both strength and wisdom, becoming no different from the weak and foolish.

**B. How tragic it is to lose so much precious time in sleep!**

How sobering that we must spend so many hours out of every twenty-four utterly unable to serve God or our neighbour, unable to perform any acts of piety or charity. Those who reflect on how short life is, how much work we have to do, and how quickly the day of reckoning approaches, cannot help but begrudge the time spent in sleep.

They will wish to sleep as little as possible and will be spurred to redeem the time when awake. They will also long for the time when they will no longer need sleep, but will instead be as the angels of

God, never resting day or night from the blessed work of praising him.

**C. What a good and gracious Master we serve, who allows us time for sleep, provides us with the means to rest, and makes sleep refreshing and restorative!**

This shows that “the Lord is for the body,” and it gives us every reason to present our bodies to him as living sacrifices, glorifying him in and with them. Sleep is even spoken of in Scripture as a gift promised to the saints: “*He giveth his beloved sleep*” (**Psalm 127:2**).

The godly person enjoys sleep in peaceful trust in God, whereas the worldly person labours in vain to find the same rest in their endless pursuit of material things. What a difference there is between the sleep of a sinner, oblivious to the fact that they are just a step away from hell, and the sleep of a saint, who, by God’s grace, has the joyful hope of being just a step away from heaven. This is the peaceful sleep God gives to his beloved.

**D. How pitiable is the condition of those from whom sleep is withheld due to physical pain or mental anguish—those who endure wearisome nights.**

These are the ones who, when they lie down, ask, “When shall we arise?”—who are thus left as a terror to themselves. It was said that of all the inhuman tortures used by the French king to force his Protestant subjects to renounce their faith, none was more effective than the cruel deprivation of sleep.

When we feel how earnestly our own nature craves sleep and how much we are refreshed by it, we should be moved with compassion

for those who, for any reason, are deprived of such rest. We should also think of those who lack other comforts that we enjoy and pray for them.

**E.** How ungrateful we have been to the God of our mercies when we allow sleep, which is such a great support and comfort to us, to become a hindrance to what is good. For example, when it gratifies our sloth and laziness, keeps us from our morning prayers, or leaves us unprepared for evening prayers. Or when we sleep at inappropriate times during the worship of God, as Eutychus did while Paul was preaching, or as the disciples did when Christ was in his agony of prayer. How justly might we be deprived of the comfort of sleep and reproached with this as the cause: "*What! Could ye not watch with me one hour?*" Those who now wish to sleep but cannot should consider how often they should have stayed awake but refused to.

**F.** We now have one day less to live than we did this morning. The thread of time is swiftly unwinding; its sands are running down, and as time departs, eternity approaches. Time is hastening on; our days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, passing and returning in an instant. What are we doing with the time we have? Are we progressing towards being ready to give our account? O that we might always go to sleep with thoughts of death upon our minds—how it would motivate us to make the most of our time! It would not make our sleep less desirable, but it would make death far less intimidating.

**G.** To your glory, O God, I now go to sleep. Whether we eat or drink, or even sleep—because that is included in "*whatsoever we do*"—we must do it all to the glory of God. Why do I go to sleep now? That my body may be restored to serve my soul, and that it might be ready to

labour with it tomorrow in the service of God. In this way, even ordinary actions, when directed to our ultimate purpose, are done in a godly manner and bring lasting spiritual benefit. Thus, the blessings we receive through them are sanctified to us, for "*to the pure all things are pure,*" and whether we wake or sleep, we live together with Christ (*1 Thessalonians 5:10*).

**H.** To your grace, O God, and to the word of your grace, I now commit myself. It is good to fall asleep having freshly surrendered ourselves—body, soul, and spirit—to God. Let your soul return to God, its rest, for he has dealt bountifully with you. In this way, we entrust the keeping of our souls to him, as David did when he said, "*Into thy hands I commit my spirit*" (*Psalms 31:5*), and as Stephen did when he said, "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*" Sleep not only resembles death, but it can also sometimes lead directly to it. Many go to sleep and never awaken, sleeping instead the sleep of death. This is why we should always go to sleep with thoughts of dying and place ourselves under the protection of the living God. In doing so, even a sudden death would not catch us unprepared.

**I.** O that when I awake, I may still be with God! Let the period of sleep, however long, not interrupt my communion with God. As soon as I wake, may I resume it. O that when I wake during the night, my thoughts may turn to God; that I may remember him on my bed, knowing that he is at my right hand and that darkness and light are both alike to him. May I meditate sweetly upon him in the night-watches, redeeming that time for good and making the best use of it, rather than allowing it to be wasted on vain thoughts—or worse, sinful ones. O that when I awake in the morning, my first thoughts may be of God, so that my heart may be seasoned with his grace for the rest of the day.

**J.** O that I may enter into a better rest than the one I am now about to enter! The Apostle speaks of a rest that believers enter into in this life, as well as a rest that remains for the people of God in the life to come (*Hebrews 4:4, 4:9*). Believers rest from sin and the world, resting in Christ and in God through Christ. They find satisfaction in the covenant of grace and their interest in it. This is their rest forever; here they dwell securely. They enter into this ark and find not only safety but also ease for their souls.

Now, O that I might enjoy this rest while I live, and that when I die, I might enter into something even greater than rest—the joy of my Lord, a fullness of joy.

**IV. Fourthly,** We must do all this in a believing dependence upon God, his power, providence, and grace. Therefore, I lay myself down in peace and compose myself to sleep because you, Lord, keep me and assure me that you do so. *Thou, Lord, makest me to dwell in safety.* David takes notice of God surrounding his path and his lying down, as he observes in *Psalms 139:3*: "*Thou compassest my path and my lying down.*" He sees God's eye upon him when he retires into his bedroom, where no one else sees him; even in the darkness, where no one else can see him. Here, David acknowledges God surrounding him as his preserver. He feels God's hand about him, protecting him from evil and keeping him safe, and under him, supporting and comforting him.

**A.** It is by the power of God's providence that we are kept safe during the night, and on that providence, we must continually depend. It is God who preserves both man and beast (*Psalms 36:6*), who upholds all things by the word of his power. Death, which entered the world through sin, would quickly lay everything to waste if God did not shelter his creatures from its arrows, which continually fly about.

We cannot help but see how vulnerable we are in the night. Our bodies carry within them the seeds of disease; death is always at work in us. A small event could interrupt the circulation of blood or breath, and then we are gone—either never to wake or to wake under the shadow of death. Men, through sin, are exposed to harm from one another; many have been murdered in their beds or burned in their sleep. But our greatest danger is from the malice of evil spirits, who roam about seeking whom they may devour.

We are utterly unable to help ourselves, and our friends are equally unable to protect us. We are unaware of the specific dangers we face, nor can we foresee how they might arise. Therefore, we do not know where to guard ourselves; and even if we did, we would not know how to act. When Saul was asleep, he lost his spear and cruse of water, and he could just as easily have lost his life, as Sisera did, who was killed in his sleep by a woman. How fragile and helpless we are, and how easily we can be overcome when sleep has overcome us! Our friends, too, are asleep and unable to assist us. Illness may seize us in the night, and even if help is summoned, no human effort can prevent it. The most skilled and compassionate doctors are powerless in such moments.

Thus, it is only God's providence that protects us, night after night—his care and his goodness. This was the hedge around Job, encompassing him, his household, and all he owned (*Job 1:10*), a hedge so secure that Satan himself could not break through it, nor find any gap in it despite his efforts. There is a special protection extended to God's people; they are hidden in his pavilion, in the secret of his tabernacle, under the shelter of his promises (*Psalms 27:5*). They are God's treasured possession, dear to him, and he keeps them as the apple of his eye (*Psalms 17:8*). He surrounds them continually, just as the mountains encircle Jerusalem (*Psalms 125:2*).

He protects their homes, just as he protected the tents of Israel in the wilderness, for he has promised to create upon every dwelling place of Mount Zion a pillar of cloud by day to shield from the heat, and a flaming fire by night to ward off the cold (*Isaiah 4:5*). In this way, he blesses the homes of the righteous so that no real harm befalls them, nor does any plague come near their dwellings.

This divine providence over us and our families is something we must wholly depend upon. We must recognise that no provision we make for our safety is sufficient without God's blessing upon it. As Scripture declares, "*Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.*" No matter how well-built the house, how securely barred the doors and windows, or how vigilant and careful the servants, all efforts are futile unless *he that keepeth Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps*, takes responsibility for our safety. If the Lord is your protector, then you can laugh at destruction and famine, knowing that your dwelling is at peace (*Job 5:22, Job 5:24*).

**B.** It is by the power of God's grace that we are enabled to consider ourselves safe, and on that grace, we must continually depend. The fear of danger, even when unfounded, is as troubling as if it were entirely justified. Therefore, to fully enjoy the blessing of being made to dwell safely, it is necessary that, by God's grace, we are delivered from our fears (*Psalms 34:4*), as well as from the actual dangers we fear. Shadows should not terrify us any more than real evils.

If, by God's grace, we are enabled to keep a conscience void of offence and to preserve our integrity; if iniquity is removed far from us, and no wickedness is allowed to dwell in our homes, then we can lift up our faces without shame, remain steadfast, and have no need to fear (*Job 11:14-15*). Fear came into the world with sin and departs with it. If our hearts do not condemn us, then we have confidence

towards both God and men, and we dwell securely. We can be assured that nothing can truly harm us except sin, and whatever does harm us has sin as its sting. Therefore, if sin is pardoned and restrained, we need not fear any trouble.

If, by God's grace, we are enabled to live by faith—the faith that places God always before us, the faith that applies his promises to our own lives and brings them before the throne of grace, the faith that purifies the heart, overcomes the world, and extinguishes all the fiery darts of the wicked one, the faith that makes unseen things real to us, and serves as the substance and evidence of them:

If we are led and governed by his grace, then we are made to dwell safely and can even defy death itself, along with all its harbingers and terrors. *O death, where is thy sting?* This faith will not only silence our fears but will also open our lips in holy triumph: *If God be for us, who can be against us?*

Let us lie down in peace and sleep—not in the strength of natural resolution against fear, nor solely through rational arguments against it, though they are helpful—but in dependence upon God's grace to work faith in us and to fulfil the work of faith in us. This is going to sleep like a Christian, under the shadow of God's wings, going to sleep in faith; and it will serve as a good foretaste of dying in faith. For the same faith that will carry us peacefully through the short death of sleep will carry us through the long sleep of death.

### **For Application**

**First,** See how much it is our concern to carry our religion with us wherever we go, and to have it always at hand; for at every moment, we have need of it—whether lying down, rising up, going out, or coming in. True Christians do not confine their religion to new

moons or Sabbaths but bring its influence into all the ordinary actions and events of daily life. We must sit down at our tables and rise from them, lie down in our beds and arise from them, with an eye on God's providence and promises. In this way, we must live a life of communion with God, even while engaging with the world.

To achieve this, it is essential to have a living principle within our hearts—a principle of grace, which, like a well of living water, continually springs up to eternal life (*John 4:14*). It is equally necessary to keep a vigilant watch over our hearts, guarding them diligently. We must set a strict guard over our hearts' inclinations and have our thoughts more under control than I fear many Christians do. This shows how much we need the constant supply of divine grace and a union with Christ, so that by faith we may continually partake of the root and richness of the goodly olive tree.

**Secondly,** See how hidden the life of a true Christian is and how much it escapes the observation of the world. The most significant part of their life is lived between God and their own soul—in the disposition of their spirit and the workings of their heart in private moments, which no eye sees but his, who is all-seeing. The saints are rightly called God's hidden ones, and his secret is said to be with them, for they have meat to eat and work to do that the world knows nothing of. Their joys, griefs, and cares are such that a stranger cannot share in them. Great is the mystery of serious godliness.

This is a good reason why we should refrain from judging one another, as we do not know the hearts of others nor witness their private moments with God. Sadly, there are many whose religion is merely outward. They may make a fine appearance or even a great noise, but they are strangers to the secret communion with God that is the essence of true godliness. On the other hand, it is hopeful that

there are many who do not distinguish themselves by any outward profession of religion, quietly passing through the world unnoticed, yet engaging deeply with God in solitude. They walk with him in the steady, consistent path of regular devotion and communion. The kingdom of God does not come with outward display. Many merchants prosper by a quiet trade, making no commotion in the world. Therefore, it is fitting that every person's judgement should come from the Lord, who knows the heart and sees in secret.

**Thirdly,** Consider the harm done by those who remain under the power of a vain and carnal mind, living without God in the world. Sadly, many people view secret communion with God as a strange and unfamiliar concept. When ministers speak of it, they ask, "Are they speaking in parables?" They lie down and rise up, go out and come in, wholly absorbed in pursuing worldly profits or sensual pleasures. Yet, God is not in all their thoughts—indeed, not in any of them. They live upon God and the gifts of his bounty every day but give him no regard. They do not acknowledge their dependence on him nor seek to secure his favour.

Those who live such a merely animal life not only show great contempt for God but also do considerable harm to themselves. They blind themselves to the truth and deprive themselves of the most valuable comforts that can be enjoyed this side of heaven. What peace can those have who are not at peace with God? What satisfaction can be found in hopes that are not built upon God, the everlasting foundation? Or in joys that do not flow from him, the fountain of life and living waters? O that they would at last become wise for their own sake and remember their Creator and Benefactor!

**Fourthly,** See how easy and pleasant the lives of God's people could be, if not for their own shortcomings. There are those who fear God,

practise righteousness, and are accepted by the Lord, yet they go about disheartened and troubled from day to day. They are full of cares, fears, and complaints, making themselves perpetually uneasy. This happens because they do not live the life of delight in God and dependence on him that they could and should live. God has fully provided for them to dwell at ease, but they fail to make use of the provision he has laid up for them.

O that all who strive to live conscientiously and are afraid of sin would also show themselves to be cheerful and afraid of nothing else. Let all who call God Father, and are careful to please him and remain in his love, learn to cast all their other cares upon him and commit their way to him as to a Father. He will choose our inheritance for us and knows what is best for us, far better than we know for ourselves. "Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me." This is a truth I have often affirmed and will continue to affirm: a holy, heavenly life spent in the service of God and in communion with him is the most pleasant and comfortable life anyone can live in this world.

**Fifthly,** See in this what the best preparation is for the changes that may lie ahead of us in this present life: to maintain a constant relationship and communion with God. Let us converse with him daily and keep regular times for calling upon him, so that when trouble comes, it may find the wheels of prayer already in motion. Then we may approach God with humble boldness, comfort, and confidence, knowing we can expect his help in affliction if we have not been strangers to him during times of peace and prosperity, but have kept our eyes always upon him.

Even when we achieve the greatest degree of holy security and serenity, lying down in peace, we must still remain prepared for the troubles of life. Our sense of ease must not rest on the stability of

created things, for if it does, we deceive ourselves and set ourselves up for greater vexation. Instead, it must be built on the faithfulness of God, which never changes. Our Lord has told us, "In the world, ye shall have tribulation—much tribulation. Count on it. It is only in me that you shall have peace." If each day is, as it should be, a Sabbath of rest in God and communion with him, nothing will seem unbearable on any day, no matter how difficult it may be.

**Sixthly,** See in this what the best preparation is for the unchangeable world that lies before us. We know that God will bring us to death, and it is our great responsibility to prepare for it. Every day should be spent preparing for our last day. What better way can we prepare for death than through frequent times of retreat to commune with God, loosening our attachment to the world that we must leave and growing in familiarity with the world we are destined for? By going to bed each night as though going to the grave, we make death more familiar, and it becomes as natural to close our eyes in peace and die as it is to close our eyes in peace and sleep.

We hope that God will bring us to heaven; and by maintaining daily communion with him, we become increasingly fit to partake of that inheritance, and our hearts are lifted into heavenly conversation. It is certain that all who will go to heaven in the future begin their heaven now, setting their hearts there. If we enter into a spiritual rest each night, it becomes a pledge of the blessed repose we will find in the divine embrace in that world where day and night cease. There, we will not rest from praising him who is, and ever will be, our eternal rest.

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