

Nearness to God

F. A. Hughes.

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Nearness to God! What thoughts these words provoke! Ecstasy — For God is love, eternally, unchangeably so; reverence and holy fear — for God is holy — yes — eternally, unchangeably so. Moral issues must be raised and settled, the majesty and integrity of God's throne maintained if His love is to be enjoyed in the intimacy of His holy presence.

There is abundance of proof in the Scriptures that the blessed God desires the company of His creature man. At the outset when sin had brought in distance it was God who moved *towards* Adam; it was Adam who moved *away* from God. Are not our affections deeply moved as we see so clearly in His word how God desired that men should be happily in nearness to Himself? The oft repeated yearnings of Psalm 107 shew His concern for men in general; Isaiah 65: 2, Luke 13: 34 and the beautiful language of Zephaniah 3 are but a very few of the many occasions portraying the fervent love of God for the company of His earthly people; Revelation 3: 20, 21 suffice to shew the same desire of Christ for His own in this dispensation. Despite all their failure He stands ever available to love's response — "I have placed Myself there, and *am* standing" is the force of the word. May we open to Him!

How graciously God has shewn the desires of His heart of love in the gift of His beloved Son! "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19: 10). The Good Shepherd sought and found His sheep. The apostle Peter touches one of the most sublime aspects of the death of Christ — ". . . the Just for the unjust, that He *might bring us to God*". Herein are the claims of God's holy throne maintained inviolate; here His immeasurable love told forth; here the desires of His own heart satisfied; but at what infinite cost — "Christ . . . once *suffered* for sins . . . being *put to death*" (1 Peter 3: 18); ". . . boldness to enter into the holiest *by the blood* of Jesus" (Hebrews 10: 19). In His lonely pathway here the precious Saviour manifested the deep desires of divine compassion; how often do we find that lovely word "come" upon His holy lips — to the "heavy laden" (Matthew 11); to "any man" who thirsts (John 7); to the "little children" (Luke 18); the list is endless, His love is supreme! Simply, affectionately, unobtrusively He drew near to disappointed hearts (Luke 24); manifesting Himself in risen power and triumph, thrilling their affections and setting their steps aright. Precious Lord!

Love, in thy *lonely life*
Of sorrow here below;
Thy words of grace, with mercy rife,
Make grateful praises flow.
Love, that on *death's dark vale*
Its sweetest odours spread,
Where sin o'er all seemed to prevail,
Redemption's glory shed.

What shall be our response? Happy indeed the experience of those (recorded in the Gospels) who were drawn to Him; the sinful woman in Luke 7 "when she knew that *Jesus*" was there, came. With

what joy her heart was filled! "Go in peace." That word signifies "a peace which is unchanging." Mary "sat at Jesus' feet and heard (listened to) His word." That word of grace, of power, of purity, of wisdom, of compassion, of life — and how much more! How great the reward of those who draw near to Christ! Speaking on Luke 7 some forty years ago to a large company in London, many of whom were unsaved, one was led to remark that the "safest place for a sinner is the presence of God. Afterwards one had to confess that it is also the safest (and most blessed) place for the believer. The apostle John experienced the intimacy and sweetness of divine love as in nearness to Christ he reclined *in* the bosom of Jesus (John 13: 23), and knew the strength and resource of that same precious love when, in the presence of a crisis, he leaned *on* the breast of Christ. Beloved brethren, the sweetness and the strength of divine love are ever available as we, in response to His love, draw near to Christ. Psalm 91 describes the blessed portion of him "that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High," those who "abide under the shadow of the Almighty." There is a most beautiful typical suggestion of this in the history of Joseph, when, as in the place of exaltation, he said to his brethren — "Come near to me, I pray you" (Genesis 45). What salvation; what sustenance; what revelations were made to them as they drew near to him whose name was Zaphnath-Paaneah!

In 1 Samuel 3 it is recorded that the boy Samuel lay down "where the ark of God was." Consider the prevailing conditions. Idolatry was rife (cf. 1 Samuel 7); Eli had "trampled" (1 Samuel 2. New Trans.) on the sacrifices of Jehovah, honouring his sons above God, turning to his own gain that which should have been offered to God. His sons were not only guilty of "evil deeds," but they anticipated the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat in that they made "Jehovah's people to transgress." In such circumstances Samuel appears. Notwithstanding man's failure and departure from God, with its consequent toll of death and disaster, God's faithfulness remained. Temple conditions were there, and the ark of God is seen. In the awful moral darkness light was available, and the meeting place of God with His people remained. In Exodus 25 God had said of the Ark — "There will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee." As yet Samuel had not embraced these great thoughts of God — but he placed himself in the atmosphere of them; in the place where God would draw near to His people, Samuel drew near to God. He was the answer to Hannah's exercise and desires; 1 Samuel 2 commences — "And Hannah prayed," but there is no mention of a request in *that* chapter. The whole utterance is one of rejoicing in God, in *Himself* and in His acts (cf. Mary's words in Luke 1). She who bears six (1 Samuel 2: 21) speaks of the barren bearing *seven*; does she look beyond all the sorrow and breakdown of *man*, and rejoice in the bringing in of One in whom perfection shines? One now with Christ has written "It is a prophesy of the ways of God . . . from the moment of its utterance until the establishment of the millennial kingdom in the Person of the Lord Jesus" (J.N.D.).

Beloved brethren, let us covet such spiritual desires, culminating as they must in a true and sustained appreciation of the presence of God; resulting, too, in worship and priestly service (1 Samuel 2: 18); of power in the prophetic word (v. 20); an understanding of God's way with His people and a spirit of continuance in prayer. We find ourselves today in conditions of moral breakdown and indifference to the claims of God; apostasy in the circle of profession, the dreadful inroads of the activities of Satan — the modern Baals and Ashtaroths. Seeking the presence of God in reality of desire will result in spiritual growth, the understanding of the mind of God and ability to serve Him in praise and His people in testimony.

Other incidents can be referred to but briefly. In the evil days of Ahab and Jezebel, when the God of Israel was provoked "to anger" more than ever before, when the walls of the cursed city were rebuilt in defiance of the word of God, Elijah abruptly introduces himself as one who "stands before the Lord God of Israel." From that known place of "nearness to God" he comes forth to rebuke the evil that

would deprive the saints of their inheritance (1 Kings 21) and to recall the affections of God's people from the service of false gods. Dear brethren, such ministry is urgent today; men who know what it is to "stand before God," to rebuke evil and support the truth. It is to such that a view of the glory and majesty of Christ is given; and the unique joy of hearing the Father's expression of His delight in His Son.

In 2 Samuel 7 David the king "sat before the LORD;" and as thus drawing near to God he at once confesses a sense of his own smallness and as he continues in the divine presence the greatness and majesty of God fills his soul. In his prayer and thanksgiving he speaks of God in *seven* distinct ways, concluding on a note of praise which surely rejoiced the heart of the blessed God — "And now, O Lord God, Thou art that God," a name by which God speaks of Himself — "I AM HE" — the SAME — the self-existent one (see Deuteronomy 32: 38 etc.). Precious indeed as in "nearness to God" to have one's affections intelligently impressed with all that the blessed God has been pleased to reveal of His renown and glory.

May we know increasingly the blessedness of drawing "near with a true heart," proving the truth of the Psalmist's experience — "But it is good for me to draw near to God." "I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Thy works." May we remark in conclusion that Revelation 21: 3 confirms the truth that God will secure His own joy eternally as the "tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."

Yes! In that light unstained,
Our stainless souls shall live,
Our heart's deep longings more than gained,
When God His rest shall give.