

Nearness to the Lord

W. H. Westcott.

Some Correspondence.

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My dear -,

Very welcome is your letter of inquiry this day. It is so evident that no one but the Lord Himself can answer it. Yet He may guide one's thoughts and pen to some helpful considerations.

Being a so-called "missionary to the heathen" is in itself no solution to your inquiry as to how to realize the Lord's presence constantly. I think I used to view such a career with awe, and try to picture to myself how holy a man would be who spent his time for the Lord among distant tribes and idolatrous peoples. But I have found that we have the same trials abroad (only varied in form) of faith and patience as at home; and alas! even there the same tendencies to failure and sin. No thought is there of defilement and impurity, but *could* find its entrance into our hearts; no malice, no envy, but *might* secure footing, and mar the work of God; no form of pride but *can* intrude even into results which He has wrought in conversions.

So that, knowing one's self as I do, it is not from any idea of superiority, but rather as one learner may put himself alongside another learner, that I venture to write.

You speak, as a seven-year-old Christian, of the hunger you have for the presence of the Lord. Who gave you that almost overwhelming desire do you think? What is it that has made the prospective joy of it to eclipse (in your heart) every earthly thing? Is it not that the Son of God Himself has begun to answer your earnest prayers: that He has at least given you a ray of His glory and a touch of His infinite love, that have withered up other things for you.

"I have seen the face of Jesus

Tell me not of aught beside."

This is the language of a soul that has had wafted to it some message of His unsearchable love.

Courage, therefore; as surely as the desire is formed by Himself for His company, and you are longing for it, does He intend to gratify it. "HE SATISFIETH *the longing soul*, and FILLETH THE HUNGRY soul with goodness." Let nothing divert you from the quest; set His presence before you as a goal more to be desired than gold or crystal, than pearls or rubies.

But as surely as you seek this most intimate place of His friendship will you have to reach it through His cup and His baptism. I know no other way. It is not the hearing of truth but the living of it that qualifies us for His company. If in John the Lord says at the time of the Last Supper — "Ye are My friends" — "I have called you friends" — He also says in Luke on the same occasion, "Ye are they which have *continued with Me* in My temptations". That was it. They had esteemed His company more than the necessities of life. They were puzzled when He spoke to them of leaven, but it served as a reminder of what they had forgotten: in the joy of having Him and thinking about Him *they had forgotten to take bread*. Do you think the Lord did not value that? To whom was it then that He gave the disclosure of His glorious Person as the Christ, the Son of the living God — of the church secret — of the kingdom-glory — in Matt. 16 and 17?

I think, however, that it would be like building on an insecure foundation if I did not point out that Christ is no longer here on earth: and that since He has passed into heaven and the Father's presence, it is only possible to enjoy His company under the conditions which His death has imposed and necessitated. Before He went there as Man the sin question was settled root and branch for God, and on behalf of believers. Before we can intelligently and fully appreciate Himself and enjoy His society, we must *see for ourselves* that this sin question has been settled root and branch. In other words, both peace and deliverance — *peace*, so that I come to God in the glorious sense that every question of my standing before Him is for ever settled in Christ; and *deliverance*, in that I know how to account for, and to be free from the power of the sin that dwelleth in me still — are necessary. Moreover, the Lord being in the heavens, we can easily see that it is only in proportion as we are enabled to withdraw from the influence of visible earthly associations that we can enjoy His presence in the sense in which you are hungering for it. For the purpose of this withdrawal and for power to retire in the solitude of the Lord's company, the Holy Ghost has been given you.

So that you have been *judicially* freed from sin, its thralldom and its judgments — you have had your heart attracted by the love and glory of Christ in His resurrection position — and you have the Holy Spirit bestowed upon you to empower you for the enjoyment of that sacred Presence which is more to you than life.

Have we learned so much from God? Sometimes (though I think not in your case) this sense of a lack to which your letter referred, is owing to the groaning of a soul occupied with itself under the overwhelming discovery of its indwelling sin. Am I right in thinking that in your case it is not so much this as it is a craving to know the Lord Himself in an intimacy which will make intercourse with Him more refreshing than a holiday, and service for Him more restful than sleep?

My love in the Lord,
W. H. WESTCOTT.

August 13, 1906

My dear -,

The very asking for help, as you did in your first, has made me realize more fully than ever how little one is capacitated for showing the way into nearness to the Lord. When I touched the 'missionary question' in my answer, it was in reply to your sentence, "I am sure nothing else but the *presence* of the Lord would keep you away out in Africa". My idea was to indicate to you that I could not answer your wish on the ground that I had been to Inkongo in the Lord's service, though we have had much of His presence vouchsafed to us there, and it has sustained us as nothing else could. But in every country where we may go our *hearts* are the same, and *temptations* surround us, and *busy details* serve to crowd out the Object Whom you are longing to reach. So that as a learner I was prepared to seek Him with you, but not *as a missionary* to teach.

I have longed to know Him! Times have been when the sense of His love and glory have been overwhelming, and one has had to pause for breath — this when alone, at home in England. Other days have been, and especially in the meetings for remembering the Lord, alone with my brother at Inkongo, when one has been loath to return to the duties that must be faced. But one has to regretfully own that these seasons have been more like the Jewish visits to the sanctuary; a very precious privilege and a holy memory, but *occasional*: enough, nevertheless, to lead one to say with David, "Early will I seek Thee: my soul *thirsteth* for Thee, my flesh *longeth* for Thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see Thy power and Thy glory so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary". I think God permits us these

moments of unearthly joy in beholding Jesus that they may ever afterwards stimulate us to seek His face and His company, and that we may never be content with what is alas! *ordinary* Christianity.

But after all, how is this intercourse to be obtained and this intimacy to be cultivated to which the way is opened in grace as I tried to show in my last?

How may these occasional seasons become more constant, if not absolutely continuous?

Sept. 25. — A long time has elapsed since I wrote the above. Now, as we near Tenerife and are once more on our way to the place appointed for us, I may be able to add a word.

I am convinced that nearness to the Lord involves a sacred path of devoted attachment which may mean isolation from many dear ones who are not prepared to yield all to Him. It is not that the path itself is or ought to be an extraordinary one for a Christian, but that most who profess Christianity do not pursue what ought to be quite ordinary for every one of us.

Hence I think that the best and most direct reply to your inquiry is, "Lay yourself out to realize all that Christ is, in the light of the whole Christian position won for you by Him". But this involves such a tremendous scope of exercise that if you were as well taught as the apostle Paul himself, and as faithful, you would still be hungering and thirsting to know Him more (Phil. 3). This is the best of intercourse with Him, that, far from palling on your taste as do the pleasures of the world, the love and preciousness and the fullness of Christ only expand while they satisfy the spiritual craving that turns to Him. You will never reach a point where you want no more, though you may even by this time have reached a point where, in knowing Him, you want no more of the world than you are obliged to meet from day to day.

I look at the various Christian epistles as having been written along the lines of Psalm 107: 9. There is satisfaction in the Christian's Saviour and Lord for all the longings created in his breast by the new birth, and directed by the Spirit: while there is His goodness beyond telling, the very goodness of *God* in Him, which in blessing us puts aught like hunger for ever at a distance. If you, therefore, read to learn Him, praying God to enlighten you, and seeking the mind of the Spirit in inditing the holy Scriptures, you will find that these are the willing disclosures of His beauty to such as love Him. He will withhold nothing that will qualify you to hold sacred intercourse with Him. It was for this He gave Himself — even for you: that He might have you for Himself peculiarly and zealously (Titus 2), that you might stand by while the deepest springs of His heart are laid open unto His Father (as in John 17), and His desires for you are uttered to the only One Who can fully take them all in. So great His love for you. The Gospels were written to present His Person and His ways beyond all compare, while the Epistles were written to unfold to us the way to enjoy Him now, and the priceless blessings which fit us to share His love and glory; also those hindrances which we must avoid in following after Him. For your soul to get its full answer you must go the way to learn all that Christ is, and the way to realize all that He has won to make yours for eternity. Did time permit, and were we allowed to write or speak further, it would be a joyful service to try to indicate some outline of His glory from each Gospel or Epistle. But you have an unction from the Holy One, and what you learn by the Spirit is the truth and is no lie. Only seek to learn everything on your knees — spiritually if not actually. My father greatly recommends the reading of their Bibles to young Christians *on their knees* — a practice he followed himself in private reading. To which I would add, make every passage as you read it an occasion of prayer to Him and talk with Him. I have often marvelled to find how He talked with me when thus engaged, and the words which are usually mere printed matter to the careless reader almost *walk* with spiritual life and power as He opens them out to one's heart by the Spirit. Then, whatever you learn — *practice*. Let nothing induce you to be a hearer of the word without your being a doer of the work

(James 1).

I must conclude this letter with a verse from Hosea 6. The first verse shows the remnant of the Jews in search of the right Person. The second verse suggests to us that the right way to enjoy life is to follow Him into resurrection: while the third verse shows that being thus associated with Him in life, there is a quiet, progressive discovery of all that He is, *if we follow* on to know the Lord. His going forth *is prepared* — everything is ready on His side — for this manifestation to you — as the morning: a little light and the scattering of darkness: then more and more light unto the perfect day. The Lord Himself shine upon you, warm you, reveal Himself to you, more and more.

Affectionately in Him.

Wm. Hy. WESTCOTT.