

The Happiness of Drawing Near to God

by Thomas Watson

Drawing near to God is a necessity for Christians, and it brings wisdom, honor, safety, peace, and riches.

Scripture: Job 28:18, Psalm 73:28, Psalm 119:165, Psalm 139:15, Psalm 139:17, Proverbs 18:10, Proverbs 23:26, Luke 15:20, Colossians 1:21, Hebrews 10:22

Topics: "Drawing Near", "Repentance"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches on the importance and benefits of drawing near to God, emphasizing that it is good for believers to seek closeness with Him. He delves into the nature of our distance from God due to sin and the necessity of repentance to draw near. Watson explains how drawing near to God is made possible through Jesus Christ as our mediator, and he highlights the various ways believers can draw near to God through prayer, His Word, and the sacraments. The sermon concludes with exhortations to draw near to God out of love, honor, safety, peace, and for the riches of His blessings, warning of the consequences of drawing back from God or drawing near hypocritically.

Transcript

"But it is good for me to draw near to God" Psalm 73:28.

This psalm is no less elegant than sacred; it is calculated for the meridian of God's church in all times; but it is especially fit for the godly to meditate upon in times of calamity. It is entitled a psalm of Asaph. Asaph was a man divinely inspired, a prophet; as well as one of the masters of music. It is called a psalm of Asaph, either because he composed it, or because it was committed to him to sing. This holy man seems here to have a dialogue with himself concerning providence.

He was ready to call God's providences to the bar of reason, and enquire concerning the equity of them. How is it just, that those who are evil should enjoy so much good; and those who are good should endure so much evil? While Asaph was debating the case with himself, at last his faith got above his sense; he considered that the wicked were set in slippery places. And like such as go upon the ice, their feet would soon slide; or like such as walk on mines of powder, they would soon be blown up, verse 18.

This did both resolve his doubt, and compose his spirit. The entrance into the psalm is not to be forgotten, 'Truly God is good to Israel:' so the Hebrew renders it certainly. Without dispute, this is a golden maxim that must be held. In the Septuagint it is set out by way of admiration, Oh, how good God is to Israel! What angel in Heaven can express it; the vulgate reads it, yet God is good; as if the Psalmist had said, though

the candle of prosperity shines on the wicked, they have not only what their hearts can wish, but more than their hearts can wish,' verse 7.

And though the godly are sorely afflicted, mingling their drink with weeping; yet for all this, 'God is good to Israel.' Here is the fountain, the stream, the cistern: the fountain is God; the stream, goodness; the cistern into which it runs, Israel. Indeed, God is good 'to all,' Psalm clxv. 9. The sweet dew falls upon the thistle as well as the rose. But though God be good to all, yet not alike good to all. He is good to Israel in a special manner. The wicked have sparing mercy, but the godly have saving mercy.

And if God be good to his people, then it is good for his people to draw near to him. So it is in the text, 'It is good for me to draw near to God.' 1. Here is something implied, that is, that by nature we are far from God. Drawing near implies a strangeness and distance. In our lapsed estate we lost two things, the image of God, and communion with God, Psalm lviii.3. 'The wicked are estranged from the womb.' Every step a sinner takes, is going further from God. The prodigal's going into a 'far country,' was an emblem of the sinner's going afar off from God.

How far are they distant from God, who have been traveling forty or fifty years from their father's house! and what is worse, sinners are not only far from God, but they do not desire to be near him, Jer. iv. 10. 'They have loved to wander.' Sin does not care to be near holiness. The wicked get as far as they can from God, like Cain, who 'went out from the presence of the Lord,' Gen. iv. 16. That is, the church of God, where were the visible signs of God's presence: he estranged himself from God as much as he could: he fell to building, thereby thinking to drown the noise of his conscience, as the Italians of old were wont to drown the noise of thunder by ringing their bells.

Sinners think God's company may be best spared, Isaiah xxx.11. 'Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.' Let us shut God out of our company; let him be no more named among us. A bad eye loves not to be near the sun. Let us be deeply humbled for our fall in Adam, which has set us at such a distance from the blessed God. Heaven and earth are not so far asunder as God and the sinner. The further we are from God, the nearer we are to hell. The farther a man sails from the east, the nearer he is to the west.

Let us of returning to God by repentance. Say as the church, Hosea ii. 7. 'I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now.' 2. 'It is good for me to draw near to God.' The text falls into these parts. 1. The person, me. 2. The act, draw near. 3. The object, God. 4. The excellency of the act, it is good. The proposition is this: That it is a great duty incumbent upon Christians to draw near to God, Heb. x. 22. 'Let us draw near with a true heart.'

For the illustration of the proposition, four things are to be inquired into. 1. How we are capable of drawing near to God. 2. Where we draw near to God. 3. The manner of our drawing near to God. 4. Why we must draw near to God. 1. How we are capable of drawing near to God. By nature we stand in opposition to God, Col. i. 21. alienated and enemies. How then can we approach near to God? - Ans. It is through a mediator. But Jesus Christ is the screen between us and divine justice.

Christ as our High Priest assumes our flesh. Christ's flesh is called a 'veil,' Heb. x. 20. As Moses when his face shone so exceedingly bright put a veil upon it, and then Israel might approach near to him and look upon him: so Christ having veiled himself with our human nature, we may now draw near to God and behold him. And as Christ makes way for us into the Holy of Holies by his incarnation: so by his crucifixion, he died to make God and us friends. The divine law being infringed, God's justice was provoked, and

satisfaction demanded, before we could approach to God in an amicable way.

Now here Christ as our Priest shed his blood for our sins, and so made the atonement, Col. i. 20. 'Having made peace through the blood of his cross.' As Joseph being so great at court, made way for all his brethren to draw near into the king's presence, Gen. xlvii. 2. so Jesus Christ is our Joseph, that does make way for us by his blood, that we may now come near into God's presence. Through Christ, God is pleased with us; he holds forth the golden scepter, that we may draw near, and touch the top of the scepter. 2.

Where we draw near to God. Ans. In the use of his ordinances. In the word we draw near to his Holy Oracle; in the sacrament we draw near to his table. In the one we hear his voice; in the other we have his kiss. Besides, we also in a special manner draw near to God in prayer. Prayer is the soul's private converse and communion with God. Prayer whispers in God's ears, Psalm xviii. 6. 'My prayer came before him, even into his ears.' In prayer we draw so near to God that we 'take hold of him,' Isaiah lxiv. 6.

God draws near to us by his Spirit, and we draw near to him in prayer. 3. The manner of our drawing near to God. God's special residence is in Heaven and we draw near to God, not by the feet of our bodies, but with our souls. The affections are the feet of the soul; by these we move towards God. David drew near to God in his desires, Psalm. lxxiii. 25. 'There is none upon earth that I desire beside you.' He did shoot his heart into Heaven by pious ejaculations. Spirits may have communion at a distance. 4.

Why we must draw near to God. Because he is our maker, 'in him we live.' He has given us bodies; they are his curious 'needlework,' Psalm. cxxxix. 15. And as he has wrought the cabinet, so he has put the jewel in it, the precious soul; and surely if we have our being from him, we cannot breathe without him. There is good reason we should draw near to Him in a way of homage and observance. God is our benefactor; he crowns us with a variety of blessings: he gives health and estate; every bite of bread we eat is reached to us by the hand of Divine bounty.

Is there not great reason we should draw near to him who feeds us? Give a beast provender and he will follow you all the field over. Not to draw near to Him who is our benefactor, is worse than brutish. God is the summum bonum, the chief good. There's enough in God to satisfy the immense desire of the angels. He is the quintessence of sweetness. In him perfections are centered, wisdom, holiness, goodness: he has rivers of pleasure where the soul shall bathe itself forever with infinite delight, Psalm xxxvi 36.

So that here is ground sufficient for our drawing near to God; he is the chief good. Everything desires to approach to its happiness. 1. See the right genius and temper of a gracious soul; it is ever drawing near to God; it loves to converse with him in private. A person truly regenerate is not able to stay away long from God, Psalm lxiii. 8. 'My soul follows hard after God.' A pious soul cannot but draw near to God. Out of the entire love which he bears to God. It is the nature of love to draw the heart to the object loved.

He who loves his friend will often give him a visit; he who loves God will visit him. The heart ascends to God in a 'fiery chariot' of love. A gracious soul cannot but draw near to God, because of the intimate relationship between God and him. God is a father, Isai lxiv. 8. 'Doubtless You are our father.' Does not the child delight to draw near to his father? There is no father like God for love; his children shall never lack; he has land enough to give to all his heirs. He loves his children so entirely, that he will never disinherit them.

How then can believers keep away from their father? they do not know how to be long out of his presence. A gracious soul cannot but draw near to God, because he has found so much sweetness and content in it.

While he has drawn near to God, he has drawn virtue from him. Never did Jonathan taste so much sweetness when he dipped his rod in the honey-comb, 1 Sam. xiv. 27. as the soul finds in communion with God. In drawing near to God a Christian's heart has been warmed and melted; the Lord has kindled his sacrifice from Heaven.

In his approaches to God, he has had the drawings of the Spirit, the incomes of God's love, the foretastes of glory: God has given him a 'bunch of grapes' by the way; he has 'tasted that the Lord is good;' no wonder then he is so frequent in his approaches to the divine majesty; he has found the comfort of drawing near to God. 2. It reproves them, who, instead of drawing near to God, draw near to the world. The world engrosses all their time and thoughts, Phil. iii. 19. 'Who mind earthly things.'

A good Christian uses the world for his necessity, but his main work is to draw near to God. Whoever he deals with, and pays short, he will be sure God shall not be a loser. He gives God a daily sacrifice; 'he follows God fully.' Numb. xiv. 14. But covetous people make the world their treasure, and what is their treasure, that does most command their hearts. Worldlings live by sense; and to talk to them of drawing near to God is to speak riddles and paradoxes to them. They can no more live above the earth, than fish can live out of the water.

They have the serpent's curse upon them, 'to lick the dust.' Things of a worldly aspect draw away the heart from God. They hinder our passage to the holy land. Had not 'the fall' beat off men's head-piece of wisdom, they would think thus with themselves: if there be any beauty in the world, what is there in God who made it? He gives the flower its color and odor; he gives the diamond its luster; he gives food its taste; and if there be such sweetness in creatures, what is there in God?

He is infinitely better than all. Shall these poor things draw our hearts away from God? shall the drop draw us from the fountain? shall the light of the candle draw us from the sun? shall we admire the gift, and forget the giver? Solomon speaks of a generation of men, 'madness is in their heart,' Eccles. ix. 3. Sure they who draw near the world, and leave God, 'madness is in their heart.' O how empty and insignificant are all other things without God! They are in their matter earthly, in their procuring painful, in their fruition surfeiting, in their duration dying, in their operation damning. 3.

It reproves them who draw near to God, but it is hypocritically; they draw near with their lips, but not with their hearts, Isa. xxix.13. The Jews (says one) use great shows of adoration, and in their synagogues burn lamps to the honor of God, but no inward devotion can be perceived. What is pomp without piety? Sinners give God the worship of their bodies, but keep their hearts for something else they love better. The heart is a virgin that God himself is suitor to. Prov. xxiii. 26.

'My son, give me your heart.' To draw near to God with the body, but not the heart is to abuse God. It is as if one should come into an apothecary's shop and ask for medicine, and he should give him an empty glass. To draw near to God without a heart is to play a devotion, and to go to hell covered with religion's mantle. 3. It reproves them who instead of drawing near to God, draw back from God; These are renegades; they once seemed to put forth fair blossoms and gave good hope of their conversion; but their spring is changed to autumn.

Either fear of persecution or hope of preferment, has turned them away from the profession of religion. Hos. viii. 3. 'Israel has cast off the thing that is good.' At Augsburg the papists gave ten florins a year to such as revolt from the Protestant faith. Men draw back from God because they never had the Spirit of God to confirm them. Such as have the Spirit's indwelling never take their final leave of God. The Spirit in

the heart is called an earnest, not a pawn. A pawn may be called for again, and taken away, but an earnest remains and is part of the sum left behind.

O how odious is it to draw back from God! The name Judas is had in abomination at this day. Sure no Protestant would baptize his child, Judas. And how dismal was his end! He who had no affections for an innocent Christ, his inward parts gushed out. If it be good to draw near to God, it must needs be evil to draw back from Him, Psalm xxxvii. 27. 'You have destroyed all those who go a whoring from you.' 3. It exhorts us all to draw near to God. It is more ingenious to draw near to God voluntarily than to be drawn near to him by affliction.

Where should the soul go but to God? where can the bee rest but in its hive? To draw near to God is both a privilege as a duty. There are but two motives I shall use to persuade you to this drawing near to God. 1. The first is in the text; to draw near to God is a good thing. 'It is good for me.' That it is good appears in several ways. To draw near to God, is our wisdom. 'The price of wisdom is above rubies.' Job xxviii. 18. No jewel we wear does so much adorn us as wisdom; and wherein is our wisdom seen more than in our nearness to God?

It is judged wisdom to keep in with great men, Prov. xix. 6. 'Many will entreat the favor of the Prince.' But a prince's love is mutable. How often does the sunshine of his royal favor set in a cloud. But it is wisdom to draw near to God; he is the sweetest friend, and the worst enemy. To draw near to God is our honor. It is counted an honor to converse with noble personages. What high dignity is it, that the great God will allow sinful dust to draw near to him! Surely the apostle did speak of it with an holy boasting, 2 John i. 3.

'Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus:' As if he had said, we do not walk with peasants of the world; we are of the blood-royal of Heaven; we live above other men; 'our fellowship is with the Father.' That the King of kings will hold forth a golden scepter to us, invite and welcome us into his presence, and bid us draw near; this is no small favor, 1 Sam. xxii. 2. 'Every one that was distressed and in debt drew near to David, and he became a captain over them.'

So that we who are distressed and in debt, may draw near to God; and that he will not only be our captain, but our husband, Isaiah liv. 5. What transcendent dignity is this! It is a wonder God does not kick us out of his presence; but that we should be admitted to see the king's face and that he should send us dainties from his own table, is an honor more fit for angels than men. To draw near to God is our safety. God is a 'strong tower,' Prov. xviii. 10. It is good in times of danger to draw near to a fort or castle, Hab iii. 4.

'He had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.' The horns coming out of God's hands, are to punish his enemies, and the hiding of his power is to safeguard his people. God is an impregnable stronghold. Indeed there is no safety, but in drawing near to God. If the sheep wanders from the fold, it is in danger of the wolf; if we straggle and wander from God, we are in danger of Satan. To draw near to God is our peace. The only thing which breaks our peace is, when we do not keep close to God: but what harmony, yes Heaven is in the soul, when it draws near to God!

Psalm cxix. 165. 'Great peace have they which love your law.' This peace, like pearl in broth, is cordial. David drew near to God, for he was 'ever with him,' Psalm cxxxix. 17. And this made his pillow soft when he went to sleep, Psalm iv. 8. 'I will lay me down in peace;' as the honey-dew falls upon the leaf: O that sweet serenity which drops as honey upon the soul while it is drawing near to God! How comfortable it is to draw near to the sun! and how sweet is it to approach near to the Sun of Righteousness.

To draw near to God is our riches. It is good drawing near to a gold mine. If we draw near to God, he will enrich us with promises, and divine consolations; he will enrich us with the 'pearl of great price,' Ephes. iii. 8. He will reward us as a king, yes as a God! He will make over his land and jewels to us; he will give us the spring flowers of joy here, and the harvest of glory hereafter. If we draw near to God, he will draw near to us. If we draw near to him in duty, he will draw near to us in mercy.

When the prodigal approached to his father, his father drew near to him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, Luke xv. 20. If we draw near to God with repenting hearts, he will draw near to us with a compassionate heart. David prayed, Psalm lxi. 18. 'Draw near unto my soul.' It is good to have God draw near to us. How sweet is his presence! he is light to the eye and joy to the heart. How happy was it for Zaccheus, when Christ drew near to him! 'This day is salvation come your house,' Luke xix. 9.

When God draws near to the soul, Heaven and salvation draw near. 2. There is a time coming, when we shall wish we had drawn near to God. We are shortly drawing near to our grave, Psalm cvii. 18. 'They draw near unto the gates of death.' The wicked who care not for God, yet at death they would desire to draw near to him. Then they cry as Matt. viii. 25. 'Lord, save or we perish;' then mercy, mercy. They run to God in distress, as in a storm men run to a tree for shelter. But God will not shelter his enemies.

The Lord gives the sinner abundance of mercy in his lifetime, (as you have seen a loving father bribing a prodigal son with money to see if he can reclaim him), but if the sinner do not be wrought upon with mercy, then at death the sun of mercy sets and a dark night of wrath overtakes the sinner. They who would not draw near to God as a friend, will experience that God will draw near to them as an enemy. How shall we do to draw near to God? Let us contemplate the excellencies of God.

He is the 'God of glory,' Psalm xxix. 3. full of glorious beauty: in comparison of whom both angels and men are but as the 'small dust of the balance.' He is the 'God of love,' 2 Cor. xiii. 11. who triumphs in acts of mercy. Well may this encourage us in our approaches to him who delights to display the banner of free grace to sinners. If we should hear of a person of honor who was of a lovely disposition, obliging all that came to him by acts of kindness and civility, it would make us ambitiously desirous to ingratiate ourselves with him and to obtain his acquaintance.

God is the most sovereign good, the wonder of love, ready to diffuse the silver streams of his bounty to indigent creatures. This, if anything, will make us willing to draw near to him and acquiesce in him as the center of felicity. If we would draw near to God, let us study our own needs. Let us consider in what need we stand for God and that we cannot be happy without him. The prodigal never drew near to his father, until he 'began to be in need,' Luke xv. A proud sinner, who was never convinced of his need, minds not to come near God; he has a stock of his own to live upon, Jer ii. 31.

'We are Lords; we will come no more unto you.' A full stomach despises the honey-comb. It is the sense of need which brings us near to God. Why did so many lame and paralytical resort to Christ, but because they needed a cure. Why does the thirsty man draw near to a fountain but because he needs water. Why does a condemned man draw near his prince but because he needs a pardon. When a poor soul reviews its needs; I need grace; I need the favor of God, I am damned without Christ; this makes him draw near to God, and be an earnest suppliant for mercy.

If we would draw near to God, let us be careful to clear our interest in God, Heb. x. 22. 'Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.' When we know him to be our God, then we draw near to him. The spouse, by virtue of the conjugal union, draws near to her husband, Psalm xlviii. 14. 'This God is our

God.' Let us beg the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God has a magnetical virtue. Corruption draws the heart from God; the Spirit draws it to him, Cant. i. 4. 'Draw me, we will run after you.'

The Spirit, by his omnipotent grace, draws the heart to God not only sweetly, but powerfully. Let us get our hearts fired with love to God: whichever way love goes, that way the heart is drawn. If God be the treasure delighted in, our hearts will be drawn to him. Servile fear makes the soul fly from God; sacred love makes it fly to him.

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