

Maintaining Intimate Fellowship with the Lord—Allowing Nothing Between

- 1 Nothing between, Lord, nothing between;
Let me Thy glory see,
Draw my soul close to Thee,
Then speak in love to me—
Nothing between.
- 2 Nothing between, Lord, nothing between;
Let not earth's din and noise
Stifle Thy still small voice;
In it let me rejoice—
Nothing between.
- 3 Nothing between, Lord, nothing between;
Nothing of earthly care,
Nothing of tear or prayer,
No robe that self may wear—
Nothing between.
- 4 Nothing between, Lord, nothing between;
Unbelief disappear,
Vanish each doubt and fear,
Fading when Thou art near—
Nothing between.
- 5 Nothing between, Lord, nothing between;
Shine with unclouded ray,
Chasing each mist away,
O'er my whole heart bear sway—
Nothing between.
- 6 Nothing between, Lord, nothing between;
Thus may I walk with Thee,
Thee only may I see,
Thine only let me be—
Nothing between.
- 7 Nothing between, Lord, nothing between;
Till Thine eternal light,
Rising on earth's dark night,
Bursts on my open sight—
Nothing between. (*Hymns*, #373)

The Bible reveals that God created man with the intention that man would become an intrinsic part of God's eternal purpose in His divine economy. For this reason, God created man in His own image, according to His likeness. God also entrusted man with the responsibility to rule over all His creation (Gen. 1:26-28; Psa. 8:4-8; cf. Heb. 2:6-9). The working out of God's goal through man depends on man becoming an intimate companion of God. Because of His intention, God is persistently

developing an ongoing, uninterrupted fellowship with man. The nature of the relationship between God and man can be compared to a marriage relationship. It must be a relationship in mutuality of respect, appreciation, and love.

God "courts" man and "woos" His chosen people so that they may be fully espoused to Him (cf. Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37-38). The profundity of God's love toward man is revealed in the incarnation—God Himself became a man, lived a genuine human life, died on behalf of man to redeem him from his sinful condition and nature, and resurrected and ascended as a man mingled with God. Having redeemed man by His death on the cross, He came in resurrection as the Spirit who gives life to regenerate man, constituting the former sinners with His own life and nature so that they might become sons of God. The Bible presents the astonishing fact of regeneration in the simplest of terms: "As many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name, who were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Having been regenerated, there is the further need for the newborn child to grow unto maturity to become a full-grown son of God. A believer's normal reaction to the Lord's courting is to yearn for and to seek to be in continuous contact with Him.

The above hymn, written by E. H. Hopkins, expresses the response of a genuine lover of God, whose hope is to match God's love with a corresponding deep commitment and an aspiration to maintain uninterrupted, unbroken fellowship with his Lord. Hopkins's burden and goal in composing this hymn are reflected in his best-known book, *The Law of Liberty in the Spiritual Life*, which focuses on the believers living in absolute harmony with God. It is possible, Hopkins contends, to live a life apart from sin, yet such a living is dependent upon the Christ who dwells within us, not upon our intention or power. In order to live such a life, there must be the removal of every hindrance, every barrier between us and the Lord. Hence, the beseeching prayer in the hymn is ever, "Nothing between, Lord, nothing between." The hymn centers attention on the genuine experience in our daily life of abiding in Christ as our sanctification. It tells us how we are able to be holy by abiding in Christ.

“Let Me Thy Glory See”

Each stanza of this hymn is a prayer that there would be no separation and no barrier breaking the believer’s relationship with the Lord. The first request is a petition that the glory of the Lord may be opened to His seeker: “Let me Thy glory see, / Draw my soul close to Thee, / Then speak in love to me— / Nothing between.” The unique means of keeping our heart pure and focused on Him is the attractiveness of the Lord Himself, not our effort, our faithfulness, or our dedication.

The Lord Jesus is the most attractive One in the universe. He is fascinating, delightful, and charming because He is both the unique God and the only genuine man who has ever lived a life well pleasing to God on earth. As a man, He lived without sin for thirty-three and a half years. Before God and man, He lived out His human life blamelessly. Not only was He irreproachable and exemplary in all His conduct; He was at the same time full of compassion and loving care toward others. He attracted the multitudes to Himself. John, the apostle, testifies:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us). (1 John 1:1-2)

John’s report is a transparent expression of a mature believer concerning what he experienced during more than three years of living with Jesus and His other disciples. John clearly saw the attractiveness of this wonderful person under every kind of circumstance, and he was able to say that what he saw was a person who existed with the Father from the beginning. Further, he testified that this One who was from the beginning had been clearly manifested to the disciples—they saw Him, heard Him, and looked upon (viewed attentively, contemplated) Him, this marvelous person. With this background of intimate observation, John proclaims that this person, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, is the very Word of life and the unique Son of God. John further testifies that through their contact with Him, the disciples had been brought into fellowship both with Him—Jesus, the Son—and with the eternal Father.

Some may think that it is more difficult for us, who have not seen the Lord, to love Him as much as the early

disciples loved Him. We have not walked with Him, seen Him, or heard Him as they did. Still we are able to testify that we love the One whom we have not seen, and we rejoice in Him (cf. 1 Pet. 1:6-8). The writer of the above hymn understood and experienced the fact that we are fully able to know Christ today and to love Him; we need only to draw near to Him and ask Him to reveal Himself to us. It is as if the writer of the hymn is entreating: “Lord, appear to me; let me see You in all Your glory. Draw me close to You in my thinking, my will, and my love; cause my love for You to abound. Lord, speak to me in Your love. I want to see You and love You as my first love. I do not agree that anything should distract, divert, or attract me away from an intimate and direct contact with You.”

The glory of the person of Jesus our Savior is the distinctive means by which we are enabled to draw near to Him,

avoiding every impediment between our soul and Him. He Himself is our unique attraction. We need to seek Him, behold Him, and spend time to enjoy Him in order that there would be nothing between. There are a multitude of things that may disconnect us from the Lord. For this reason, we need to learn to

pray day by day that His attractiveness, loveliness, and glory would appear to us.

Two Distracting Centers—the World and the Self

According to the essence of the hymn, the things that come between us and the Lord are of two major categories—the world and the self. The world is the outward satanic means of occupying us with a multitude of diversions, occupations, entertainments, and leisure activities. All are designed to keep us occupied so that we have no time and little or no energy to find God or learn to know Him. The Old Testament experience of the children of Israel in Egypt is a graphic type of the efforts that Satan employs to keep God’s people enslaved to the world and away from God.

While the world is a constitution of outward distractions, the self is the inward satanic thought joined to our soul, which has captivated us and brought us into a realm of independence from God. The self is the part of us that has become one with the satanic thought. It generates a life in which there is no place for and no need of God. Man is the center, and all the universe exists for the convenience of man. Everything in the world is directed toward building up a completely egocentric character in man. A careful review of the Bible indicates that through

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the fall, the soul of man has become mingled with the mind of Satan, full of rebellion and self-importance. This mingling of the satanic mind with the soul of man is the self.

The outward activities of the world harmonize with the inner thoughts of the self to interrupt our fellowship with God and divert our attention away from God. This hymn addresses the urgent need and desire to abide in undisturbed and uninterrupted fellowship with the Lord, free from the distractions of the world and the self.

The Distractions of the World

The world in this distracting sense is a system organized by Satan; the things and the people of all the earthly creation have been arranged into a system over which God's enemy rules. *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines the distraction of the world as

the aggregate of things earthly; the whole circle of earthly goods, endowments, riches, advantages, pleasures, etc., which, although hollow and frail and fleeting, stir desire, seduce from God and are obstacles to the cause of Christ. (357)

After man fell, God still stayed in close contact with him, covering him so that he could be in His presence. But after Cain killed his brother Abel, man fell further, and Cain took the lead to go out from the presence of God. Suddenly, man was without God. God had been everything to man, but now man was without several key elements needed for his existence, such as a protective environment, food supply, entertainment, and weaponry for self-protection. In Genesis 4:16-24 we can catch a glimpse of how the world, under the satanic influence, developed through Cain and his descendants. First, a city was built for man's protection and self-existence. Within this city a culture without God was developed. Jabal developed the industry of cattle-raising as a means of living independently from God. Jubal became the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe, developing the industry of entertainment to amuse and divert man further from God. And Tubal-cain became the forger of every cutting instrument of bronze and iron as a means of survival and self-protection outside of the covering of God's presence.

The Lord Jesus identified Satan as the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). And John in his first Epistle recognizes that "the whole world lies in the evil one" (5:19). After the fall, the world gradually became more chaotic. This opened the way for Satan to come in and bring men and things under his subtle reign through an organized system. First John 2:15-16 confirms that the world is directly in competition with and opposed to the Father and His will: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him; because all that is in the world, the lust of

the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father but is of the world." A footnote in the Recovery Version of the Bible underlines the satanic strategy of the anti-God world system:

Here, as in John 15:19; 17:14; and James 4:4, [*world*] denotes an order, a set form, an orderly arrangement, hence, an ordered system (set up by Satan, the adversary of God), not the earth. God created man to live on the earth for the fulfillment of His purpose. But His enemy, Satan, in order to usurp the God-created man, formed an anti-God world system on this earth by systematizing men with religion, culture, education, industry, commerce, entertainment, etc., through men's fallen nature, in their lusts, pleasures, and pursuits, and even in their indulgence in necessities for their living, such as food, clothing, housing, and transportation...The whole of such a satanic system lies in the evil one (5:19). Not loving such a world is the ground for overcoming the evil one. Loving it just a little gives the evil one the ground to defeat and occupy us. (Lee, 1 John 2:15, note 2)

Outward Threats and Diversions

Stanza 2 of the hymn begins to expose the things that so easily distract us from our fellowship with the Lord. The prayer here issues from the heart of one who knows the distractions of this world. He asks the Lord, "Let not earth's din and noise / Stifle Thy still small voice; / In it let me rejoice— / Nothing between." The earth, which was created as a place for God's enjoyment of man and man's enjoyment of God, has been filled with many noises that drown out the still small voice of God's speaking to His people. It seems that the reference to the still small voice is based on the experience of the prophet Elijah, who was distracted by the "din" of the threats of the queen of Israel, Jezebel. She raised up a culture full of idolatry in the nation of Israel. Elijah opposed Jezebel's husband directly and her indirectly by exposing the prophets of Baal and destroying them. Under the threats of Jezebel, Elijah, feeling that he was all alone among all the people of God, fled to Mount Horeb, went into a cave, and lodged there. Then Jehovah came to him and began to converse with him concerning the situation and Elijah's response to it. Eventually, Jehovah instructed him,

Go out, and stand upon the mountain before Jehovah. And suddenly Jehovah passed by, and a great, strong wind rent the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before Jehovah—Jehovah was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake—Jehovah was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire—Jehovah was not in the fire. And after the fire, a gentle, quiet voice. (1 Kings 19:11-12)

Outwardly speaking, the world is a place full of deviations, disturbances, and diversions—"din and noise." We need to

be careful to not be sidetracked from our enjoyment of God by the noise and activity of the world of entertainment and sports; the political world of nations filled with intrigue, violence, and self-interest; and the education and commerce of the world filled with fascinating ideas particularly focused on becoming rich with this world's treasures or famous in the eyes of others. The world is permeated with a seemingly inexhaustible collection of the inventions of men, offering an array of self-preserving and self-glorifying features. In the midst of all these diverting commotions, disturbances, and leisure activities, we need to beseech the Lord to appear to us and give us ears to hear the still, small voice of His whisperings to us from within: "Nothing between, Lord, nothing between!"

Inward Anxieties of Earthly Cares

In the first part of stanza 3 there is a turn from the outward din and noise of the world to the inward anxieties engendered by worldly cares: "Nothing between, Lord, nothing between; / Nothing of earthly care." In the parable of the sower the Lord Jesus spoke of the sowing of the seeds among the thorns; the thorns indicate one who "hears the word, and the anxiety of the age and the deceitfulness of riches utterly choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Matt. 13:22). The anxieties of the age cause many to lose their proper center; they may not turn away from the Lord, but the cares cause a significant diminishment of interest, attentiveness, or concern for spiritual matters. Their relationship with the Lord becomes fruitless because the seed of life is choked out by the anxieties and cares of this world.

As an inoculation against the anxieties of the world, the Lord Jesus urged the disciples not to store up for themselves treasures on the earth (6:19). These earthly treasures can be easily stripped from the grasp of the owners. Thieves may come in; moth or rust may cause the loss of the earthly treasures. The Lord pointed out that the riches of the world constitute another master competing against God: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (v. 24). All our efforts to secure our income and guard our resources will rob us of our dependence on God, who is our only reliable source.

The Self—a Subtle and Hidden Insulation

The prayer in stanza 3 turns from the world's distractions

and earthly cares to the actions of the self, which can sever our single, sincere, and uncomplicated connection with the Lord. While the world is somewhat easy to recognize, the self is a more subtle and hidden interference to our intimate contact with our Lord. The word *self* as a singular word is not used in the Bible. It is used frequently as a compound pronoun (*myself, yourself, himself, herself, themselves, etc.*). In Matthew 16:21-26 we can clearly see the constituents and actions of the self. Following the revelation that Peter declared—"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16)—the Lord disclosed to His disciples the means by which He would bring in the redemption of man and would initiate the coming of the kingdom of God to the earth: He would pass through death and be raised on the third day (v. 21).

This was a vision-changing event in the lives of the disciples of Jesus Christ. The

Lord had brought them away to Caesarea Philippi; there He engaged them in the consideration of the essence of His person, first by asking, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" (v. 13), and then, "But you, who do you say that I am?" (v. 15). Peter responded boldly, "You

are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). The Lord informed Peter that flesh and blood had not revealed this to him, but "My Father who is in the heavens" (v. 17). The dramatic unveiling of the nature of the Lord's commission as the Christ of God and of the intrinsic essence of His person as the Son of God opened the way for the Lord to share with His disciples how He would complete the purpose for which He had come to earth as a man. He proclaimed to His disciples that He would go to Jerusalem and suffer many things, be killed, and on the third day rise again.

Peter, along with the rest, was shocked and overwhelmed by the impact of the Lord's announcement. Peter took the lead to strongly protest the Lord's impending persecution and death; he even rebuked the Lord and insisted that what the Lord spoke of would never happen. The surprising reply of Jesus to Peter is an unveiling of the unseen spiritual warfare surrounding the events that were transpiring and the nature of this conflict. The Lord said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men" (v. 23). Although Satan is the source of this warfare, the place of the warfare is in the minds of men. Although Peter uttered this protest, the thought and will behind his proposal came from the subtle opposer, Satan, whom the Lord rebuked directly.

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Despite this, the human aspect of Peter's remonstrance issued from a mind that was set on the things of men rather than on the things of God.

Self-pity

Stanza 3 continues, identifying the things of the self that may come between the soul and the Savior: "Nothing of tear or prayer, / No robe that self may wear." *Tear* may indicate something of self-pity. We may often be very sorrowful over a variety of circumstances or situations, and our self may rise up, feeling mistreated, not cared for in a proper way, unloved, abused, molested, or just generally neglected. Actually, these feelings may or may not have a factual basis, but it does not matter. The self does not always need a factual basis in order to be filled with self-pity. Here the hymn writer recognizes that such attitudes, such sorrows, are just another cloak for the self to wear. The self has an innate demand to be recognized. In a sense, the self does not need to be well treated or well recognized; it simply needs attention. If the self is uplifted and promoted or even suppressed and held down, the self still remains. Only denial through the cross and by the Spirit is effectual.

Self-glory

Instead of the tears of self-pity, there may be the prayer of self-glory, the sense of fulfilling a religious duty. The self is at home in whatever atmosphere one chooses. It simply desires to be actively involved or passively recognized. In Matthew 16:25 the Lord's words are quite arresting: "Whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it." We need to consider carefully this word of warning. What does it mean to lose our soul-life? We have seen that the soul-life is congenitally contaminated with the mind of Satan and has become the self. The soul of man has become corrupted and incapable of living a life that is acceptable to God. To lose the soul-life is to abandon all hope of preserving or improving the existing constitution of corruption that is the fallen soul. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of the ultimate deceitfulness of the human heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things, / And it is incurable; / Who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). The human heart is the essence of the soul, and the deceitfulness of the heart is the deceitfulness of the soul. It is "incurable." The cross of Christ is the unique way by which a believer can be delivered out of the darkness that envelops his soul.

Losing the soul-life is the self being killed by the cross. It is not enjoyable to our natural man. But when we turn to the Lord and set our mind on the things which are above (Col. 3:1-2), we enter into a refreshing atmosphere of fellowship in the divine life. Death brings in resurrection. Through death and resurrection we are

transferred into another realm—the realm of life and light. Here we have the genuine enjoyment of Christ as our life, and we are already in the foretaste of the age that is coming. We have lost our soul-life in this age, and we are gaining our soul-life for the age that is coming.

It is enlightening that the hymn writer identifies prayer as a possible robe that the self may wear; the fallen soul often expresses itself in spiritual garb. It appears to be so proper and so wonderful before God. But in reality, it is deceitful above all things. If one wills to hold on to his soul-life, he will lose it in the coming age; if he wills to preserve himself in this age, he will lose the joy of being joined to the Lord in the age that is coming. This was the conviction in the heart of the apostle Paul in his testimony to the believers in Philippi. He had many things that, according to the Jewish law and tradition, had once given him reason to boast in his standing before God. But having seen Christ in His unequaled excellency, Paul testifies, "What things were gains to me, these I have counted as loss on account of Christ" (3:7). To lose the soul-life is to absolutely abandon and forget about all the things in which we have put our trust and to commit our entire being to the cross of Christ. This means that we take Christ as everything, and we have no confidence in who we are or what we can do to please God. We follow the apostle in his conviction that "we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh" (v. 3).

The Presence of the Lord Being the Antidote to Unbelief

Stanza 4 continues with the prayerful burden that nothing will come between the believer and the Lord: "Nothing between, Lord, nothing between; / Unbelief disappear, / Vanish each doubt and fear, / Fading when Thou art near— / Nothing between." Unbelief is another dominant factor that can separate us from our contact with the Lord. We are aware, perhaps, that the Lord instructs us through the Word to be anxious for nothing; we should simply come to Him and make our requests known to Him with thanksgiving (cf. Matt. 6:25-33; Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Pet. 5:7). But we may often be caught by the sin of unbelief. We may be like Peter when he walked on the water to join the Lord on the stormy sea (Matt. 14:29-30); Peter began well, but when he took his eyes off of Jesus and looked upon the waves and the wind, he began to sink. Then he cried out to the Lord to save him, and "immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him and said to him, You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (v. 31). Then together the two walked to the boat and got up into the boat, and when they did so, the wind ceased (v. 32).

Whatever our situation or need may be, the Lord is able to meet the need. He also is able to bring a calm to every

trial. We need only to draw near to Him, and every doubt and fear will vanish. Unbelief cannot remain in the presence of the Lord Jesus. We need to cultivate our fellowship with the Lord through the habit of contacting Him daily in the Word, prayer, singing, and fellowship with other believers. Such a living is the reality of following Him by denying the self and taking up the cross.

Being under the Lord's Shining and Walking in the Light

Perhaps the most strategic means of maintaining our intimate contact with the Lord is His shining. In stanza 5 the hymn turns to the crucial matter of the light of the Lord, and stanza 6 speaks of the subsequent walk in that light. Stanza 5 says, "Shine with unclouded ray, / Chasing each mist away, / O'er my whole heart bear sway— / Nothing between." We do not always realize our separation from the Lord; the world and the self are both very subtle in creating a fundamental separation between us and the Lord. Sometimes very small things cause a great separation. Loving the world just a little can cause a great disconnection; allowing the self to occupy just a little portion of our attention may cause us to lose our soul-life in the age that is coming. Therefore, we always need the light of the Lord's life to shine in us; "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Abiding in the presence of the Lord requires us to be exposed in the light to remove all the shadows that often envelop the natural mind, clouding it in the darkness of this world and in the deception of the self.

Having received the Lord's shining, we need to learn to walk in the light as He is in the light (vv. 6-7). Thus, stanza 6 utters the prayer of one walking in harmony with the Lord. "Thus may I walk with Thee, / Thee only may I see, / Thine only let me be— / Nothing between." The normal Christian life requires a healthy

walk, a vigorous practice of living in oneness with the Lord in His light. We need to maintain a direct and intimate contact with the Lord, keeping ourselves in the light of His glowing presence. When He is near, we will experience much enlightenment because He Himself is light. We must practice reading the words of the Bible, maintaining a prayerful contact in the Word and through the Word, singing hymns, and confessing our sins, shortcomings, and trespasses regularly. Finally, we should seek to walk in the light, not deviating from the fellowship of the Lord concerning all the things upon which He shines. We need to treasure His shining presence!

Anticipating the Blessed Hope of His Coming

The final stanza of the hymn exults in the anticipation of the day of the Lord's coming when we will be joined to the Lord in unbroken oneness: "Till Thine eternal light, / Rising on earth's dark night, / Bursts on my open sight— / Nothing between." The time will come when there will be no experiential possibility of separation between us and the Lord: "Then we who are living, who are left remaining, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we will be always with the Lord" (1 Thes. 4:17). The expectation and hope of His coming is a strong attraction for us today to maintain an unbroken fellowship with the Lord until He comes again to receive us to Himself.

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Works Cited

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Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin" (1 John 1:7).

is: We walk in the light, but God is in the light because He is light. "The light is the element in which God dwells: compare 1 Tim. 6:16...this walking in the light, as He is in the light, is no mere imitation of God, but is an identity in the essential element of our daily walk with the essential element of God's eternal being: not imitation, but coincidence and identity of the very atmosphere of life" (Alford).