

## *Communion with God*



COMMUNION  
— *with* —  
GOD

*Reformed Spirituality*



HERMAN HOEKSEMA

*Edited by* DAVID J. ENGELSMA



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## Preface

WITH THIS second volume of the devotional writings of Reformed preacher, professor, and poet Herman Hoeksema, we keep the promise we made in the preface of volume one.

Like the first volume, volume two consists of selected meditations Hoeksema wrote for publication in the Reformed magazine, the *Standard Bearer*, in the years 1924–1947.

Whereas the theme of volume one is the struggle and suffering of the believer, the theme running through volume two is the believer's communion with God. Hence, the book's title.

Communion with God produces a sweet Christian experience (the words "sweet" and "sweetness" occur repeatedly in the book) and a remarkable Christian activity. Hence, the three main sections into which the book is divided.

Just as the three main sections are arranged logically—first, communion; then, experience; and, finally, activity—so also the perceptive reader will detect a definite order in the arrangement of the subjects in each section. Call it the logical order of salvation. The order is not chronological with regard to the original publishing of the meditations in the *Standard Bearer*.

The book is thoroughly biblical. It is pervasively Christ-centered: communion with God is in, through, for, and because of Jesus Christ. It is solidly doctrinal and, therefore, instructive in the Reformed faith. Some pieces are polemical. Polemics are not foreign to the Christian experience.

All the meditations are experiential. They express the knowing, desiring, feeling, and acting of the faith of the heart that is in communion with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

As little as Hoeksema countenanced the sickly mysticism of feeling and experiences divorced from, in addition to, or alongside faith's knowledge of the sound doctrine of Scripture, so strongly did he warn against a cold, barren intellectualism—a knowledge of the head only, and not also of the heart. One can learnedly discourse of total depravity, routing the enemies of the doctrine in debate, without himself knowing the truth of it in such a way that his heart breaks with sorrow over his sinful condition. That is to say, the spirituality of Herman Hoeksema was genuinely Reformed.

No doubt, each reader will be especially moved—and blessed—by different meditations. But who can fail to be stirred by the righteous indignation in “Scarcely Saved”? “Dead to Sin” is one of the most powerful demolitions of antinomianism ever written. And “The Poor Rich—the Rich Poor” (the parable of Dives and Lazarus) is both artistically portrayed and skillfully applied.

One meditation is so intensely personal that the whole of it is Hoeksema's conversation with God—heart to heart. We listen in. And, lo, it is we who are speaking; the thoughts are our very own (“They Are My Enemies”).

The phrases are vivid: “You cannot dance to glory”; “the very Son of God is crucified all through the history of this world, and heaven is silent.”

The figures are powerful: the Christian life of striving single-mindedly toward the goal, like the mountain stream rushing, undivided, toward the ocean; the proud unbeliever compared with the humble believer, as the lofty but lifeless mountain peak compares with the lowly lily at the foot of the peak—small, obscure, but full of life, and beautiful.

Long buried (for most) in old volumes of the *Standard Bearer*, these devotional treasures now become ours, for profit and for pleasure.

DAVID J. ENGELSMA

# PART I

Communion With God



# 1

## *Nearer to God*

“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.”

—Psalm 73:28

How good it is!

How inexpressibly sweet; how peace affording; how assuring in its influence and strengthening in the time of the trouble it is, that I may draw near to God.

There is no cold dogmatism in this beautiful conclusion of the poet, so pregnant with quiet power and confidence. It is personal experience, profoundly felt personal experience, that expresses itself here. Deeply rooted peace, profound rest, and keenest joy for his once-troubled soul there are in these words.

In the psalm the poet reveals a significant chapter of his soul's experience. The narrative of his soul-trouble as told by himself in this profound hymn flows on like a turbulent river, rushing down the mountainside, tumbling over rock and reef; now toppling over the edge of a sudden precipice, foaming and roaring and splashing as it pitches downward; now scurrying and eddying agitatedly through the deep and narrow gorge; sometimes curving and winding its way around cliffs and boulders; sometimes disappearing from sight to bore its passage through dark and mysterious tunnels; then gradually coming to rest and quietly meandering through wood and dale and flowing onward through meadows green under the blue sunlit heavens; now a stately stream gliding on and on until it finds rest in the deep bosom of the ocean.

Such had been the poet's experience. And that ocean of peace, that destination of rest, he had now reached in drawing near unto God.

Good it is for me, oh, how good to draw near unto him!

The boundless ocean of life. The fathomless fountain of good. The endless source of light.

Draw near to God, the changeless amid the changing, the rock of my salvation, merciful and mighty, faithful and true, whose wisdom is unsearchable, filled with tenderest lovingkindness and overflowing with soul-restoring grace; my Jehovah and my redeemer, my strong tower and my sure defense, my loving Father and my caring shepherd, who forgives abundantly and saves mightily and protects safely and guides securely..

To God, whom to know is eternal life; to live apart from whom is death. Whom to possess is to possess all.

God, my God, my boundless joy.

To draw near unto him.

Oh, how good!

---

To draw near unto God.

Nearer, ever nearer until I may look at his face and repose at his heart in childlike joy and still confidence.

What a privilege!

All the more blessed and sweet because I know by experience the dark misery of being far from him, of being alienated from the living God, of being without him in the world.

For such I am by nature.

Apart from him, nourishing dark enmity against him in the deep recesses of my heart. Wandering far away from him, in paths of sin and iniquity, following the lusts of the flesh and the lie of the devil. For I was guilty in myself, a child of wrath and subject to his condemnation; and I was afraid of him. I knew that I could not draw near unto him; neither would I. To me he was a consuming fire, and the farther I would depart from him, the

more comfortable it seemed for my soul. I would rule him out of my thoughts and all my meditations, and like the fool I would say in my heart, there is no God. Besides, I was a child of darkness, and the darkness I loved. The prince of darkness was my spiritual father, and it was my delight to do his will. The light I hated, and in my heart I cherished all the dark follies of sin.

To be apart, far apart from God then seemed good to me.

So foolish was I and ignorant; so foolish I am still by nature.

But he drew me first.

And I began to draw near unto him by virtue of his drawing.

Before the mirror of the perfect law, he drew and I stood riveted at the spot beholding the folly and misery of my own image. For I beheld myself fastened with chains of sin, locked in bonds of hell, a slave though I had imagined myself free in the service of sin. I understood then that the wicked have no peace, and for liberty and peace I longed. I knew not then, but true it was that even then there was born within my heart a deep yearning after God. For he drew me, and the recognition of my own sinful image, miserable and undone, was the first result of my drawing near unto him. In that longing I mourned and wailed. I longed to be delivered from the burden of my guilt and saved from the power of death. I would fain break those chains of darkness and bonds of sin.

And I realized that I was impotent; that there was no power of salvation in me, in man, in any creature.

Who would, who could deliver me?

And he still drew me...

Drew me with cords of love.

Drew me through the voice of his everlasting word.

To the accursed tree he drew me, and he showed me the boundless love with which he loved his people from before the foundation of the world. He revealed to me the thoughts of peace he had thought before the world was, to deliver his children from darkness and to make them heirs of everlasting light and joy. And he showed me the blood, the precious blood that is powerful to

save and that cleanses from all sin. He drew me and I longed to be partaker of that salvation, to be able to say that he is mine and I am his. I realized it would be my only comfort in life and death, for body and soul, for time and eternity. He drew me still and I drew nearer and by faith in my redeemer I washed my garments in the blood of the Lamb.

And I was free.

Free from all my guilty stains. Free from the law of sin and death. All through the marvelous power of that wondrous cross.

Free to draw near unto God, to his light and life and love; believing, trusting, hoping.

And now I have peace.

Near to God. Ever nearer. Oh, how good it is!

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Always near him.

That, and that only, is good for the child of God in the midst of the world.

Still he is inclined by nature, even after he was drawn into the blessed communion with the fount of God, the ever living and ever blessed God, to depart from him.

The feet of the child of God are sometimes almost gone. His steps do sometimes well-nigh slip. Then he wanders. His eye is not trustingly fixed upon the God of his salvation who does all things well; his hand is not firmly clasped in the mighty hand of Father. Oh, surely, Father is always near, thanks be to him. He never fails though we fail him; he never forsakes though we would let him go. But in the consciousness of our heart and mind we are not near him.

Then the way grows dark.

For then we know there are wicked men who set their tongue against the heavens, who foam and rave and oppress the righteous. They are servants of the devil who walk in darkness and sleep not if they have not committed iniquity. We see those whom pride compasses about as a chain. They are around us. They sit



in high places in the world. They work their way and often occupy the seat of honor in the church. They corrupt the truth and persecute those who are faithful to the name of Jesus and his testimony. And they prosper. Their eyes stand out with fatness and they have more than heart could wish. All they undertake seems to succeed. Adversity and suffering they seem not to know.

Over against the way of the wicked we consider the way of the righteous, our own way. All seems vain. Our way is dark. Our justice fails to appear. Our chastisement is there every morning. More miserable we seem than any man.

And then it is not good for us.

For then we are at odds with our God, far from him.

We grow fretful and envious at the wicked, and we criticize the dealings of Jehovah. We think that his way with us is not good. There is no peace, no rest of heart and mind, no steadfastness of purpose, no courage or strength for the battle, no joy of faith, no patience in suffering, no brightness of hope, no glow of love.

And we are inclined to sit by the wayside, hang the harp in the willows, and weep.

Who does not know such moments?

The poet knew. Abraham knew. Elijah knew. David knew.

All God's people know.

But the trouble is not with our way; and the trouble lies not in God's dealings with his children; the trouble is that the whirl and perplexities of our life have succeeded in carrying our sinful heart away from God. And it is not good to draw apart from him even for one moment.

Draw near again to God, and you will put your trust in the Lord God. And to trust in him implies to lean on him; to surrender yourself and your way and your enemy and your trouble and suffering completely to him; to rely solely on the Lord your redeemer, on his wisdom and power, on his love and care; and to follow in childlike confidence where he leads the way. It means that you have taken all your trust away from everything else, from your own wisdom and judgment and strength, from men and

princes, so that you neither lean on them when they seem in your favor nor fear them when they rave against you; and that you have placed all your trust in Jehovah your God. It implies that you will cling again closely to Father, firmly grasp and hold the hand that grips yours, and renounce your own weak and fallible judgment of things, of the way, of the perplexities and mysteries of life, so that though the way seem all wrong and dark and dreary and destructive, you nevertheless know that all is well and that all things must work together for good to those who love God, and in joyous assurance you sing in the midst of seeming darkness and gloom:

My Saviour, 'neath Thy shelt'ring wings  
My soul delights to dwell;  
Still closer to Thy side I press,  
For near Thee all is well (*Psalter* 163:3).

Nearer, always nearer!

Until I see no more darkness and danger and raving enemies, but look only at him, faithful and wise and true, filled with lovingkindness toward his children, merciful in their sufferings, yet leading us by his counsel often through ways of oppression and grief, in order to take us to glory afterward and to prepare us for the day of his perfected covenant.

Oh, then it is good for me. And still ashamed that I ever departed from my faithful guide, yet drawing nearer to him who is abundant in forgiving mercy, I take courage to complete my song:

My soul shall conquer every foe,  
Upholden by Thy hand;  
Thy people shall rejoice in God,  
Thy saints in glory stand (*Psalter* 163:3)

---

Yes, good it is for God's child to draw near to God.  
Good it is for him to turn his eyes away from man in whom

there is no strength and from things that deceive, and to put all his trust in the Lord his God.

For only then will he be able to realize his calling.

Was he not called out of darkness into the marvelous light of God in order to proclaim his virtues and sing his praises and tell in the world of his wondrous works? And how shall he, if in his own sinful judgment he frets and rebels and criticizes the ways of God? Or how shall he, if he does not put all his trust in the Lord and in times of brightness and prosperity instead attributes things to self and to an arm of flesh?

Evidently, apart from God he will murmur in adversity and boast in prosperity.

But draw near now to God and trust also in him.

Commit your way unto the Lord.

All the way...

And you will be strong, but not through an arm of flesh; you will boast, but not in self. But your praise will be of him who is your life and your light, your joy and your strength, and you will tell of all his wondrous works, counting and recounting them one by one.

To the praise of his glory in the midst of the world.

Presently all the dreary night shall be past and the way shall be finished and the end shall be reached and we shall be near him—nearer, ever nearer, seeing him face-to-face and beholding the beauty of the Lord our God in his everlasting tabernacle.

Oh, that will be good for you and for me.

Fullness of joy!

## 2

### *God's Abode with Us*

“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

—John 14:23

Lord, how is it?

Such was the question that had arisen in the heart of Judas, not Iscariot.

To him there was an element of mystery in what the Lord had just told them. He believed but did not understand. Hence, the inquiry: Lord, how is it?

Jesus had spoken words of comfort to them with a view to his departure from them. He was going to the house of many mansions, Father's house, and he would prepare a place for them there. He would come again when the place was prepared to take them with him, that they also might be where he would be. In the meantime he would not leave them orphans. He would come to them. A little while yet and he would depart out of this world into the world of heavenly and unseen things, hidden from the carnal eyes of the world. Then the world would see him no more. But they, his disciples, would see him, for he would live and they would live also.

To them, therefore, he would manifest himself, while the world would not see him.

Upon this Judas, not Iscariot, pondered.

He longed to grasp this truth. He felt that here was comfort indeed. Vaguely he realized that this was some other form of manifestation of fellowship of the Lord with them that would more than comfort them for the present departure of their beloved master.

But still the thing was strange, new, mysterious, and beyond his comprehension.

Hence, the eager query: Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself unto us and not unto the world?

How shall these things be?

---

Blessed mystery!

God in Christ will make his abode with us.

That is the answer to Judas' question. This dwelling of God with us in Christ is the new form of manifestation of Christ, in which the world cannot share, which is for those only who love him and are beloved of the Father.

We will come unto him and make our abode with him. Glorious blessing!

There is a figure of speech in these words. It is the figure of home life. God will dwell with us, will make his home with us, and will receive us into the intimacy of his own divine family life. That is the meaning of his making his abode with us.

A home is more than a mere house. Let a man possess ever so splendid a house, situated in the loveliest beauty spot on this earth, surrounded by all the glorious loveliness nature can furnish, where murmuring brooks meander through sunny lowlands and shady woods, where flowers bloom in rich variety of colors and birds chirp and warble sweetly in the early morning; let his house be decorated with all the splendor modern art can create and be supplied with all the conveniences of modern invention; let his estate surpass in splendor that which Louis XIV established for himself in Versailles; let him be surrounded by a veri-

table army of servants who move at his bidding—yet, if he have nothing more, he cannot boast of possessing a home.

He has a mere house, beautiful yet cold, splendid yet bare, glorious to behold yet without attraction.

But enter now the simple dwelling of the poor where love unites the hearts of the family who make their abode here. There is no splendor here. Everything you see testifies that they who dwell here must be satisfied with the merest necessities of existence. The house is crowded in between similar dwellings in the street, the rooms are small, the walls are bare, the furniture is simple. But here dwell father and mother with their children in the intimacy of love. Here you find peace, mutual confidence, friendship, fellowship, delight in one another's presence, a seeking of one another's well-being, hearts united in the harmony of love.

Home, sweet home!

Such is the figure.

Not, indeed, as if Father's house—when all things shall be ready and the place shall be fully prepared, and the heavenly tabernacle of God shall forever be with man, and he shall have made all things new—shall not also be beautiful. It shall surpass all the glory that man can ever create, it shall be far superior to whatsoever eye has seen or ear has heard or has entered into the heart of man. Every earthly figure is inadequate to represent the heavenly glory of that house.

But this external beauty, though it properly belongs to the realization of Father's dwelling-place with his people, is not its essence.

The essence of this house is in the perfect realization of the idea of the home. We will come unto him and make our abode with him. God's home with us! It means that the glorious, infinite, ever blessed God will receive us into the sphere of his own, blessed family life; that he will love us and make us taste his love in heavenly perfection; that he will establish that relation of intimacy between himself and us in which he will open all his heart and mind to us and make himself known to us according to the

utmost capacity of the created being who bears his image; that he will have no secrets from us and we will have no secrets from him; that we will put all our confidence in him and he will trust us; that he will make us taste the blessedness of his own glorious life; that we will see him face-to-face and know him even as we are known; that he will walk with us, call us evermore his sons and daughters, speak to us face-to-face as a friend with his friend; that he will always make us say, "O, my God! Abba, Father!"

Thus it will be in eternal, heavenly perfection.

And thus it is, in spiritual principle, even now.

The new manifestation is not for the world but for those who love him.

For he came unto us and made his abode with us, according to the promise of Christ. He came to us, sinners, guilty, damnable in ourselves; to us, who would not come to him, who foolishly hated him, fled away from him, hid ourselves, our all, from him. He came as the God of our salvation, in all the beauty of his holiness and righteousness and mercy and grace. He came to us with the forgiveness of sins, with the gift of perfect righteousness, his own righteousness, with the grace of adoption unto children, with the beginning of eternal life.

And we received him. Oh, yes, we received him, when he made us the objects of his wonderful grace.

Oh, wonder of grace, we opened our hearts to him, because he made us.

And we hid nothing from him anymore.

No, nothing. Even our sins, our foolishness, our wickedness, our transgressions we confessed.

We confess them daily, because we have our delight in him, are truly sorry after God, and are eager to please him.

Always he forgives. Always he clothes us anew with his own righteousness. Always he calls us his sons.

God's abode with us.

Blessed grace!

Our God in Christ.

He it is who will come, who did now come to make his abode with us.

For notice that the Lord says, "We will come and make our abode with him." And this "we" evidently refers to the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

This coming and abiding with us of the Father and Christ constitutes the new manifestation of our Lord, of which he had been speaking, which is only for those who love him and keep his word. It cannot be for the world, for the world loves him not and does not keep his commandments.

But how must we conceive of this coming of the Father and of Christ to us?

How shall *they* make their abode with us? Are there two who will come to dwell with us? And who is the Father? What is the relation between this Father and our Lord Jesus Christ? Is it the meaning of these words of the savior that the Father, as the first person of the holy and blessed Trinity, and the Son, as the second person of the glorious threeness, will make their abode with us? How can this be? Where would be the blessed Spirit as the third person of the divine family?

Clearly, this cannot be the meaning.

Rather we must understand the Father to be the triune God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who for his sake is also our God and Father. He it is who will come to us and make his home with us and spread his tabernacle over us and receive us into his own blessed family life. But he will do so through Jesus Christ, our Lord. When the Lord says, "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him," the meaning is that Christ will come unto us and will dwell with us and in us. And in him and through him it will be the ever blessed God, as the God of our salvation, who will establish that blessed relation of covenantal friendship with us, in which we shall know him even as we are known.

For Christ is the revelation of the Father.

Outside of Christ there is no manifestation of the ever blessed



God as our Father and friend, in whom we may confide, with whom we may live in fellowship, to whom we may flee for refuge, whom we would seek.

For God is a consuming fire for guilty sinners such as we. Him we do not seek, but flee far from him. To him we do not open our hearts, but from him we would hide ourselves, even though the rocks must fall upon us and the mountains cover us.

But Christ is the manifestation of the God of our salvation. In Christ the Father came to us, for he is the eternal Son, the express image of the Father, the effulgence of the Father's glory, God of God, blessed forever. He came to us, sent by the Father, according to his eternal purpose, in the likeness of sinful flesh, in the form of a servant, like unto his brethren in all things, sin excepted. He came to us, reaching out for us in our sin and darkness and death, through the awful cross. There he took upon himself our sins and our iniquities and with them stood in the place of judgment in the terrible hour, that he might bear our transgressions away forever.

Then he departed, went away from us, through the resurrection from the dead, into the glory of the heavens, into the bosom of the Father, receiving the glory that he had with the Father before the world was. He went away with the right to take us with him, to come to us again, that he might abide with us forever. And he did come again, for he received the promise of the Spirit. In that Spirit he came and manifested himself to us, and not unto the world, and made his abode with us.

That coming was the promise fulfilled: "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

God, the Father, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Christ of the Scriptures.

For that Christ of the Scriptures is the full and only manifestation of the Father as the God of our salvation. In him we know the Father. In his face we see the God of our salvation, from whom we have no secrets, and with whom we may have the blessed covenantal fellowship of friendship.

That is why there is no knowledge of him, as long as we are in this world, and no experience of his abode with us except through the Scriptures.

Until earthly things shall pass away.

Then we shall be like him.

And see him as he is.

---

How is it, Lord?

How shall it be that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? And the answer: This manifestation is possible only in the sphere of the light of love.

If a man love me, Christ says that he will keep my words, and the Father will love him. If a man love me not, he will not keep my sayings, and my word is the Father's word. If a man keep not the Father's word, the Father will not love him and cannot make his abode with him.

Yes, such is love.

If a man love me, he will keep my words.

Love is not a vague, sentimental feeling, a matter of the emotions, expressing itself in smile or tear, vanishing under stress as the fleecy morning clouds before the rising sun. It is a matter of the deep heart, a matter of the mind and of the will, expressing itself in delight in the words of Christ, in keeping his commandments, in walking in his way, in hatred of and sorrow over sin, in true repentance, in an earnest desire and endeavor to walk not only according to some, but according to all his precepts.

Oh, say not that you love him when you walk in darkness.

For he who loves me keeps my words.

And say not that the Father in Christ came to you and made his abode with you, if you do not walk in that active love. If you do, you are a liar. For if a man love me and keep my words, then the Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him. But what then?

How shall these things be? Must we, then, love him first, in order that we may make ourselves worthy of his love or receptive to his love? Must we first prepare our hearts as a suitable abode for him, before he will come and receive us into his home? God forbid! Love is always of God. He loves us first. Our love is but the return to him of his own love. He loved us in the blood of the cross, while we were still enemies.

Yet the sphere of love, created within us by himself in our hearts, is the only sphere in which he will dwell with us.

And in the way of keeping his word we taste his blessed fellowship.

Here in small beginning.  
Soon in heavenly fullness.  
Blessed hope!

# 3

## *Peaceful Rest*

“I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou,  
LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.” —Psalm 4:8

I will both lay down and sleep.

An act of quiet confidence, of serene tranquility of mind and heart that results when the soul succeeds in unburdening itself of all care and anxiety.

Who knows not from experience how peculiarly oppressing for the care-worn soul is that still hour of the night when one lays himself down in order to seek peaceful rest in sleep?

Full of whispering spirits, floating in the darkness, seems the night; they hover over the restless soul who vainly seeks to escape in the oblivion of restful slumber; they seem to flit to and fro, each carrying his own woeful message of trouble and anxiety; now they approach one by one, each sustaining our attention as if to impress the soul more deeply with the distressing burden of his intimations; now they crowd in upon the soul together, attacking in wild confusion the helpless victim who laid himself down but finds no rest.

They are but the whisperings of the soul itself, withdrawn from the distracting influences of a busy world.

The day has drawn to its close, the day with its toil and labor, its struggle and battle, its thousand and one matters that demanded our attention. The day in which we were never left alone, in which the bustle and excitement of a busy world stirred all about us and kept the soul from communing with itself. The day

in which we were up and doing in the struggle for existence, slaving, perhaps, in the sweat of our brow, pressed from every side by others in the same maelstrom of life with us. The day is finished; the tumult has ceased; the night has fallen and spread the wings of its darkness over a toiling world. Having finished another stretch of our weary pilgrimage, we stretch our tired limbs upon our beds to seek refreshment and new strength for the battle of a coming day. In the lonely stillness the soul is cast back upon itself; the mysterious depths of the subconscious, kept closed by the burdens of life in the daytime, are opening themselves; from these depths thoughts of trouble and worry crowd in upon the mind as so many evil spirits, keeping the eyes from sleep, the soul from peace, the body from rest.

It is peculiarly the hour of anxious questionings.

That hour, if any, is apt to make us join in with the wail of the poet of olden times.

The thought of God brought me no peace,  
But rather made my fears increase;  
With sleepless eyes and speechless pain  
My fainting spirit grieved in vain;  
The blessedness of long ago  
Made deeper still my present woe (*Psalter 210:2*).

Then, if ever, comes the moment when the soul can find no rest with the ways of God, with respect to the things present and future, temporal and eternal, natural and spiritual; when it attempts to solve problems too difficult for solutions; when it would bear burdens too heavy for human shoulders to carry; when the soul of the child of God is frequently filled with worries it should not have and cannot unload itself to commit its way unto him who does all things well. Many there be who ask in that moment, who shall show us any good?

The farmer who sowed his seed during the day will worry about rain and sunshine, about winds and storms, and in vain he tosses restlessly on his bed at night; the man of the city, whose

sphere of labor and struggle is in office or factory, will be filled with anxiety about scarcity of work, or about unions and corporations of the world crowding him out of a living. The rich will worry about thieves and robbers who break through and steal; the poor about the empty bread basket; the sufferer will concentrate all his mind upon his pain and sorrow; the child of God in the world will restlessly toss about in perplexity because of the mighty powers of darkness that threaten him, that threaten the church and the cause of the kingdom of our Lord: the devil, the world, the power of sin.

It is the hour of anxious reflection.

It is of that hour that the poet speaks.

He will lay himself down, and he is confident that he will sleep, that he will find peace upon his bed.

Not because his life was carefree and he knew nothing of the troubles and afflictions of the present time. For, as in most of his songs, so here he speaks of his distress and sufferings. He was in trouble. Evil men crowded all about him and turned his glory into shame; they loved vanity and sought after leasing. It was a time in which many anxiously asked, who will show us any good?

Neither is he confident of finding rest in sleep in that anxious hour, when the soul is apt to commune with itself, because he was one of those supercilious natures who are not at all affected by the troubles of this present time, like dumb dogs and asses that lie down and sleep, untroubled by the question of whether the dawn will find them alive; thoughtless fools...

But he speaks the language of calm assurance, of quiet confidence, because somehow he got rid of his burdens.

The burdens are there, and he is fully conscious of them.

Needs and wants, troubles and afflictions, distress and suffering, vain men who hate him, wicked men who seek his hurt, ungodly men who plot for his destruction in the darkness of the night—he is aware of them all.

Yet somehow he feels perfectly safe; he is assured that all things are well with him.

In the confidence of that blessed assurance he says, "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep."

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Peaceful rest!

But how does the psalmist attain to that tranquil state of mind and heart?

Where is his ground for the calm assurance that he will both lay himself down and sleep, without being anxious and careful about many things?

Thou, Jehovah, only makest me dwell in safety.

There is the answer.

Jehovah is the sole ground of David's confidence. In him alone David puts all his trust. It is this trust in the Lord alone that causes him to be at peace with the world and with all things—enemies, dangers, threatenings, troubles, and afflictions included.

David is aware of the fact that enemies prowl about his dwelling in the darkness of the night. He is keenly conscious of their murderous purposes. He is acquainted with many troubles that even now afflict him. He knows not what the morrow may bring. There are a thousand problems that he cannot solve, innumerable burdens that are too heavy for him to bear, mighty powers rising against him that he is too weak to oppose and overcome, many things that might well fill his soul with fear and worry, so that sleep would be far from his eyes. But in the midst of these, with the enemy raving and the billows of affliction surging all about him, he both lays himself down and sleeps.

Because he knows that he dwells in perfect safety.

He dwells in safety because Jehovah makes it so. Jehovah surrounds him and keeps watch over him, while he lays himself down to sleep. The watch of Jehovah makes his dwelling safe and secure against all the troubles and dangers that might threaten to overwhelm him.

Is not Jehovah the Almighty?

That he is the Almighty implies nothing else than that there is no power beside him, without him, apart from him, independent

of him. If the Lord were merely the greatest among the great, the most powerful among the mighty, the strongest of all the strong, there might still be reason to fear and be anxious; for do not the strong sometimes overcome him who is stronger than they? And if enemies and dangers were powers in themselves, might they not still disturb the soul of the poet by their presence, even though he knew that the Lord was stronger than them all? Might they not come upon him unawares, surprising even the Lord who keeps watch over his sleeping servant?

No, the Lord, Jehovah, is the Almighty. He is not merely supremely powerful among the mighty, but there is no power apart from him. The enemies, the dangers, the storms of trouble, and the billows of affliction—all these have no power, cannot stir, are most absolutely helpless but by the will of him who keeps watch. If he keeps watch over our bedside, if he is the sentinel standing guard over our abode, he will make us dwell in safety.

No enemy of his people, no power of evil that would do them hurt, ever surprises him so that it would not do his bidding.

For this almighty guard at the dwelling of his people is the all-wise God!

He willed eternally that no harm should come to those who love him, but that all things should work together for their good. For he ordained them for eternal glory, and he willed and counseled all things in such a way that they must be means unto that end of the salvation of his people. In his all-comprehensive wisdom he assigned to all things, small and great, good and evil, their appointed and proper places, and the place of all things is such that they must cooperate for the good of those whom he loved before the foundation of the world. Plenty but also scarcity, rain but also drought, health but also sickness, friends but no less enemies, the good but also the wicked, the devil and his demons as well as Michael and his angels, joy and sorrow, peace and war, life and death—all things serve the predestinating purposes of Jehovah. For he works out his counsel, and he neither slumbers nor



sleeps. No enemy can evade him to do his beloved harm. How safe, then, is the dwelling over which he keeps watch!

For he is Jehovah.

Faithful and true he is in his unchangeable love toward his people.

His watch will be constant.

He is the unchangeable God in himself, and with him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. And as he is in himself, so immutable is he in his love and his saving purpose with respect to those whom he ordained to be made like unto the image of his Son. He keeps covenant and truth with those who fear him, forever and ever.

How safely, then, dwells he whose abode is guarded by Jehovah.

Thou, Lord, makest me dwell in safety.

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Thou only!

In the midst of a thousand dangers lurking, the child of God dwells in safety.

His safety lies in the strong protection of the almighty and all-wise, faithful covenantal God who surrounds him like an impregnable fortress.

The knowledge and the assurance that Jehovah thus cares for him and stands guards at his dwelling is the source of that calm confidence he expresses in the words: I will both lay me down and sleep.

He is at peace with Jehovah.

Hence, he is at peace with all things.

Note that this confidence of the poet is so strong and assured because it is undividedly fixed on the Lord his God. The Lord alone makes him lie down and dwell in safety. It is not the Lord and his own power or ingenuity that is the basis of his trust, the source of his calm assurance; it is not the Lord and his armies, his

horses and his chariots, that constitute the ground of his carefreeness. It is the Lord alone.

Thus it must be.

We are apt to divide our trust between self and Jehovah, between men and the Lord, or between many things and the Most High. More than we are willing to admit to ourselves, our hope is frequently fixed on the creature and our confidence is put in princes. To many imaginary rocks we cling in times of troubles for strength and refuge. Always these little rocks of our own imagination are deceiving and vain, and they fail us. Trusting in them, we imagine that we can lay ourselves down in peace and sleep. But they drop from under us, they prove but sinking sand, and as they crumble away when we would cling to them, our souls are anew filled with fear and worry, and in vain do we lay ourselves down to sleep. Our souls find no rest.

Thou only!

Away with all other ground of trust and assurance. Away with all idols, products of our own imagination.

Jehovah alone makes us dwell in safety.

Our eye fixed on him.

The prayer in our hearts and upon our lips: Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

All anxious questionings shall cease; no more will we ask, with a heart filled with needless care: Who will show us any good? Will he who clothes the grass and cares for the sparrow forget you, O ye of little faith?

In peace we will dwell in safety. With the poet of the psalm we shall be able to say, "I will both lay me down and sleep."

Until the storms be past!