

Live As in His Presence

Knowing God is always with us must inform every decision we make about how we live.

Endeavour to keep a due guard over your words, that you may habitually speak nothing but what is true on all occasions. Consider what a high offence it is against the God of truth to speak falsely, either through design or inadvertence.

In telling any story or relating past actions be careful to speak deliberately and calmly, ever remembering you are in the presence of the great and holy God. Every sin is a contradiction and offence to some divine attribute. Lying is opposite and offensive to the truth of God. Whenever you find any extraordinary assistance from the Spirit of God, either by illuminating the mind, strengthening the soul or raising the affections, be sure for some time after to keep a stronger guard upon yourself. I have often observed that after the greatest enlargements in prayer and the greatest professions of devotedness to God, we are permitted to fall into great temptations. I humbly conceive this to be commonly for one of these reasons: (1) to try the sincerity of the mind, to show us whether or not we are in our outward conversation the same we profess to be in our retirements; (2) to humble the mind, which upon such occasions is too apt to be elated.

WALK IN HUMILITY

It is very natural upon reflection on any extraordinary performances to entertain too high a conceit of ourselves, especially if we live among people who observe no rule in their actions. So apt is vain, foolish man to turn the grace of God into wantonness and to forget that God who makes them to differ from the rest of the world. To Him be glory!

What an exceeding condescension it is for the Holy Spirit at

any time to grant His assistance to such creatures as we are. And how careful we ought to be lest at any time we should grieve Him.

Be extremely careful to purify your mind from all that may offend Him. Keep it calm and composed and, as much as possible, separate from the world. That still small voice is not heard amidst the thunder and noise of tumultuous passions.

Keep the mind in a temper for recollection, and often in the day, call it in from outward objects, lest it wander into forbidden paths. Make an examination of your conscience at least three times a day, and omit no opportunity of retirement (retreat) from the world.

“My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9, KJV) was the most that an apostle could obtain upon very earnest prayer. Do thy duty; make use of all the means for obtaining that grace which God affords thee. Throw yourself upon the divine goodness for success, and firmly rely on the merits of Christ Jesus to supply the deficiencies of your performances.

THINK OF HIM OFTEN

Beware of immoderate mirth, anger or any other passion, especially for some time before the family or private devotions. Take care to guard the mind against them. Take at least a quarter of an hour to recollect and compose the thoughts before your immediate approaches to the great God.

If but an earthly prince or some person of eminent quality were certainly to visit you, or you were to visit him, would you not be careful to have your apparel and all about you decent before you were to come into his presence? How much more should you take care to have your mind in order, when you take upon yourself the honor to speak to the sovereign Lord of the universe?

He is infinitely too great to be trifled with, too wise to be imposed on by mock devotion, and He abhors a sacrifice without

a heart. A habitual sense of His perfections is an admirable help against cold and formal performances. Rash and precipitate prayers and abrupt breaking off from them to follow business or pleasure is such an affront to the holy God.

I am inclined to think that all people, even those who have not the light of the Gospel as well as Christians, do know more than they practice. The common principles of morality are so self-evident, though perhaps not innate, that it is hardly to be supposed any person in the world can be really ignorant of them. What creature under heaven that has the use of reason can be ignorant of the being of God, and that they ought to live in subjection to Him from whom they receive their own being and all things necessary for the support of that being?

Yet, in reality, how few practice an unfeigned subjection of themselves towards Him. And what can be the reason of this, but the want of consideration to these first principles of religion.

Be careful to maintain a constant habitual sense of God in your mind. Live and act as in His presence. Think often of His omnipresence and omniscience, of His power, wisdom, goodness, justice, truth and above all of His infinite purity. This will be a check upon the mind and the best preservative against all temptations.

LOOK TO HIS STRENGTH

Since it hath pleased the infinitely wise God to unite our minds to these bodies, we must acquiesce in His appointment and not pretend to separate them wholly from all the inconveniences that are incident to this union. We cannot receive the knowledge of things without us but by our senses, and we cannot altogether prevent the strong impressions that sensual objects are wont to make upon the mind.

We must in this case endeavor to maintain the superiority of

mind over matter, lest it be corrupted by a too close adherence to sensible objects. We must preserve the government of reason and not suffer our passions to get the ascendant over us.

Therefore, be sure to be very hearty and earnest in praying to God for strength to govern and regulate your affections. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Therefore, humbly implore the divine majesty to steer your soul by His Holy Spirit through all the intricate scenes of human life. Depend not on your own strength or reason, but rely only on His infinite wisdom, and He will guide you by His counsel and at last conduct you to His glory through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Daily problems are opportunities to exercise virtue and receive the benefit of divine strength. There is hardly one day that does not verify the truth of our Savior's words, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34). What through the weakness and corruption of our natures, the unavoidable business of our station, many unforeseen accidents, unexpected company and cross occurrences, we have occasion given us daily to exercise our virtues of one kind or other.

Yesterday you had an extraordinary occasion to use your justice and patience, today, your prudence, temperance and charity in forgiving injuries. You did well in applying yourself to the supreme Fountain of virtue for grace in this perplexed affair. And you accordingly found that His "strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9), that He is Truth itself and "all His promises are yea and amen" (2 Cor. 1:20).

As you have this day had a fresh instance of His hearing your prayers, so be very careful never to venture upon any business without first begging the direction and assistance of God. This will be a check upon your mind when you would do any thing you know to be unlawful or dubious, and will encourage

you with hopes of success in your lawful undertakings.

How unjustly does the profane part of the world charge religion with melancholy and moroseness. Our happiness even in this world does entirely depend on the favor of God, which we cannot hope to enjoy without the constant practice of piety and virtue.

It may sometimes happen that religious persons may now and then be peevish and morose, but I dare say 'tis not religion, but their want of it that makes them so. The best men in the world are here in a state of imperfection, and corrupt nature will not be wholly conquered in this state of mortality. There will be deficiencies in their virtues and oftentimes great imperfections mixed with them.

Yet, notwithstanding all the inconveniences or faults that attend good men, they are the only persons who can in any tolerable sense be called happy and well tempered. Allowing for the inevitable imperfections of this life, the only truly happy people are good ones.

TRUST HIS INFINITE WISDOM

Be not discouraged with your own failings, nor spend so much time in thinking on them. Consider that perfection is the Savior's endowment; sincerity is yours. His merits (if relied on by a firm faith, joined with your sincere endeavor to obey the whole will of God) will supply thy deficiencies.

Praise God for illuminating your mind and for enabling you to prove that His wisdom is as infinite as His power. The use you are to make of these discoveries is to praise and love and obey. Therefore, be exceeding careful that your affections keep pace with your knowledge, for if you study the divine perfections as matter of mere speculation, your knowledge will but enhance your guilt and increase your future torment.

You must know, that you may adore and love! And if you are now more rationally persuaded that God is infinitely wise, then

learn by this knowledge to more cheerfully submit to the order of His providence.

Submit your reason so far to your faith as not to doubt those points of faith that are mysterious to us through the weakness of our understanding. Adore the mystery you cannot comprehend. Be not too curious in prying into those secret things that are known only to God, nor too rash in censuring what you do not understand.

Those methods of providence that seem to you involved and intricate, perplex not yourself about, but resolve them into the infinite wisdom of God, who knows “the spirits of all flesh” and best understands how to govern those souls He hath created.

“We are of yesterday and know nothing” (Job 8:9). But His boundless mind comprehends at one view all things, past, present and future. As He sees all things, so He best understands what is good and proper for each individual with relation to both worlds.

Read a companion devotional.

Editor’s Note: Morning and evening, Susanna Wesley diligently chronicled her experiences with God. This article is compiled from journal entries written over the course of several days.

Susanna Wesley

By Joseph Martin

Susanna Annesley was born in London on January 20, 1669. Her minister father took special interest in her and gave her opportunities for “formal” education. He also allowed her to take part in theological discussions with minister colleagues.

When Susanna was 19 years old, she married 26-year-old Samuel

Wesley, a newly ordained Anglican priest who was named rector of Epworth parish. Within the year, Susanna became pregnant with the first of her 19 children, 10 of whom survived into adulthood.

Samuel was thrown into debtors' prison, and Susanna's gifts blossomed while he was away. She always sought better ways to develop her children's talents, giving them several hours of formal education and religious training each day. She invested time particularly in John, who she believed had special gifts.

Years later John, along with his brother Charles, started a revival movement that spread throughout the world. Almost everything John taught in this movement—known as Methodism—was based on principles his mother had instilled in him as a child.

For this reason, many consider Susanna Wesley the mother of Methodism. She lived long enough to see the movement birthed but died in 1741.