

Following Hard After God

"My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me."

– Psalm 63:8

Summary:

David joins two essential truths of the believer's life: the soul earnestly pursues God, while God's gracious power sustains the pursuit. Earthly success could not satisfy David, and his past experience of God only deepened his desire for more. To follow hard after God is therefore more than a weak inclination; it is an intense, persevering pursuit that accepts effort, sacrifice, difficulty, and delay. Yet believers do not advance by their own strength. God's right hand keeps them from falling through sin, sinking under suffering, or declining from duty, so that amid mingled fears and hopes they remain faint, yet pursuing.

Outline:

1. The believer both pursues and is upheld

- The soul follows hard after God, while God's right hand secretly sustains every step of the pursuit.

2. God alone is the believer's supreme good

- Neither success, power, nor earthly pleasure can satisfy the soul that has learned to desire God himself.

3. Experience of God increases holy desire

- Spiritual knowledge gives a lasting relish, and every taste of grace awakens hunger for fuller communion with God.

4. Following hard requires earnest perseverance

- The believer presses on through distance, hardship, discouragement, apparent neglect, and every needed sacrifice.

5. God's power preserves the believer

- His right hand guards against sin, supports under suffering, strengthens for duty, and keeps hope alive in every trial.

Text

Here are two acknowledgments, distinct in expression; the second offers relief from the first, while the first is equally clear evidence of godliness. Many say, "Who will show us any good?" and pursue the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. But who says, "Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?" Who "stirreth up himself to take hold of God"? Such people have always existed, and their number continues to grow; their souls follow hard after him.

It may seem surprising that this was the case with David. Few people ever achieved as much in life as he did. He rose from great obscurity to splendour, affluence, and power, and came to sit upon a throne, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Some might ask, "What more could this favoured mortal hope for or desire?"

Yet he prays to be delivered from men of the world who have their portion in this life, and exclaims, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." He was also a good man who had enjoyed much of God's goodness. But rather than leaving him content, this deepened his longing for more; therefore, he says, "To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary."

We cannot pursue a good we do not know, nor can we wholeheartedly seek one we do not value. Yet the knowledge of divine things, given through the Spirit's teaching, always touches and shapes our affections. Experience awakens a lasting delight, and that enjoyment deepens our hunger and thirst for righteousness.

When we have tasted the firstfruits, nothing less than the fullness of the harvest will satisfy us. After sipping from the streams, we naturally long to drink from the fountainhead. In the same way, God—God in Christ, God in covenant, the God of all grace—is the believer's deepest joy, desire, and pursuit. Though heaven and earth are vast and filled with countless delights, the believer can say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." "It is good for me to draw near to God."

But what does it mean for the soul to follow God—to follow hard after Him? Surely, it means far more than a languid, inactive inclination or "the desire of the slothful" that destroys him because his hands refuse to labour. Rather, it reflects a deep and urgent concern that awakens a person to life and earnestness, draws the whole soul into action, reconciles him to every

necessary effort and sacrifice, however difficult, and encourages him to persevere through whatever obstacles or discouragements he may encounter along the way.

Sometimes the distance feels long, the climb is steep, the road is rough, and the weather is discouraging. Enemies may force us backward. At times, we lose sight of him and ask those we meet, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" When we see him again, he seems to move forward as we do; and when we draw closer and begin to catch up, he seems to look back, frown, and ask us to step away.

The experiences and feelings of Christians in the divine life help them understand these allusions. Who among them has not, like the Jews, at times been "discouraged because of the way"? Who has not resembled Barak's adherents, "faint, yet pursuing"? Who has not often said, "My soul followeth hard after thee"?

And who among them has not also had reason to say, "Thy right hand upholdeth me"? If God goes before his people in one respect, he is with them in another. Though he may test them through what seems like neglect, he quietly sustains them. Though he may seem to forsake them, he is truly supporting them and giving them strength equal to each day's needs.

His right hand represents His gracious power, preserving and inspiring them as they move forward, cleaving to the Lord with wholehearted purpose, according to the promise: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

Thus his right hand upholds them in three ways: from falling into sin, sinking under suffering, and declining in duty. The believer's experience is a dawn—a mixture of pain and pleasure, fear and hope, struggle and triumph. Like a burning bush not consumed or a storm-tossed ship that does not sink, he may be troubled but not distressed, perplexed but not despairing, and cast down but not destroyed.

Even in his most difficult moments, he can gently challenge and encourage himself in the Lord his God: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, *Morning and Evening Exercises* (January 16, Evening), first published in 1854.