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SERMONS AND TRACTS OF JOHN GILL
SERMONS ON VARIOUS TOPICS

**The Presence of God, What It Is,
and the Means by Which
It May Be Enjoyed**
2 CHRONICLES 15:2

by John Gill

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*Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth*
— Psalm 60:4

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SERMON 97

THE PRESENCE OF GOD, WHAT IT IS, AND THE MEANS BY WHICH IT MAY BE ENJOYED

2 CHRONICLES 15:2

The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and If ye seek him, he will Be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you. ^{<1415D>}

In the preceding chapter we find that Zarah, the Ethiopian, came with an army of a thousand men, and three hundred chariots, against Asa, King of Judah: who made as good a preparation as he could, in order to give him battle. Before the onset was made, Asa, at the head of his army, put up a prayer to God, addressing him after this manner, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on thee; and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God, let not man prevail against thee. This prayer was heard, and answered; he obtained the victory over the Ethiopians: He routed them, pursued them, and took from them a large spoil, and returned in triumph to Israel. As he was coming thither, a prophet from the Lord met him. The Spirit of God came upon Azariah, the son of Oded, and he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him: Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.

The Lord is with you. He had been with Asa and his army; he had given him victory; and they were now returning with great spoil. And the prophet suggests, that he would yet be with them: that he would appear for them, whenever they should be in distress, and do the like things for them he had done, while they were with him, or continued to serve and worship him. *And if ye seek him,* as Asa did, by prayer, when in distress, he will succour and relieve you. *But if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.* If you forsake his worship, and go into idolatrous practices, he will forsake you, and give you up into the hands of your enemies, to carry you captive into other

lands. ***This is the sense of the words. I shall now endeavour to improve them,*** by way of accommodation, to spiritual purposes. ***The passage, it may be observed, contains three answers to so many important questions.*** For instance,

I. *When, and how long the Lord is with his people?* The answer is, *While they are with him.*

II. *When the Lord may be found by his people?* The answer is, *When they seek him.*

III. *When may the Lord forsake his people?* The answer is, *When they forsake him.*

I. *When, and how long, is the Lord with his people?* The answer is, *While they are with him. The Lord is with you, while ye be with him.*

Here I shall inquire, What it is for the Lord *to be with his people*; and then, What it is for them *to be with him*; which is the answer to the question.

First, What it is for the Lord to be with his people. To be with them, is to grant them his presence; but this must be understood, not of his general, or essential presence which is every where, and from which there is no fleeing. Of this we are to understand the Psalmist, when he says, *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or flee from thy presence?* There is no such thing as fleeing from the presence of God, in this sense, because it is every where. He fills heaven and earth with his presence; there is no place that is destitute thereof; for *he is not far from every one of us: in him we live, and move, and have our being.* He is not only with all his creatures upon earth (and particularly with men) and with the angels in heaven; but even with the devils in hell. *If I make my bed in hell* (says the Psalmist) *lo, thou art there!* But this is not the sense in which I understand the Lord's being *with his people*. It does not intend his Omnipresence, which reaches to all creatures; and therefore is not peculiar to any persons, good or bad.

Nor do I understand it of his being with his creatures in a providential way; for so is he with all men. He is the preserver of men in general, He supports them in their beings. He upholds their souls in life, and his *visitation preserves their spirits.* He is the preserver both of man and beast. And not only is he with them to support their beings; but he is with them to supply their wants. *The eyes of all wait upon him;* and he opens the hands

of his providence, and gives them their portion of meat in due season. *He* is with all to protect and defend them, He is a God at hand, and a God afar off.

Nor is this to be understood of his special presence, in a *providential way*, with his own dear children. He is *the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe*. This presence of God, in a providential way, Jacob entreated, saying, *If thou wilt be with me*, in a special manner, in a way of providence. So the Lord promised Joshua, that he would be with him in a special manner, to counsel, help, and assist him, and to give him victory over his enemies. The Lord is, in a variety of instances, in providence, with his people in such a special way as he is not with others. He makes all things *work together for good to them that love him, who are called according to his purpose*. It is not, however, of this presence, that I intend to treat; but of the *gracious* presence of God with his people, which Moses so earnestly entreated, saying, *If thy presence go not with me; carry us not up hence*. That presence of which David, in so importunate a manner, deprecates the loss: *cast me not away from thy presence*. From the general or essential presence of God, he could not be cast away: nor does he mean his special presence in a way of providence; but his gracious presence as appears by what follows: *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit*.

Now to be with God, to enjoy his presence in this sense, is to have the light of his countenance, for which the Psalmist prays, *Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us*. This God graciously vouchsafes unto his people, so that they walk in the light thereof: *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound. They shall walk, O Lord in the light of thy countenance. That joyful sound*, the gospel, leads men into light and liberty: and they, under its influence, when it is comfortably applied to them, enjoy much spiritual peace, and have much of the presence of God. *The light of his countenance* denotes sensible communion with him. *The countenance of the Lord beholds the upright*; always beholds them, whether they are sensible of it or no. But to have the light of God's countenance in a sensible manner, is, to know that God is their covenant God and Father, and that he smiles upon them, having *loved them with an everlasting love*. Now this is to be with God and to have God with us: in other words, to enjoy his presence. Thus he lifts up the light of his countenance, and indulges his people with communion with himself. Nor can there be any communion without his being near, and very near. *Truly*

our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. Now when the apostle, and those with him, could say this, they had a real internal experience of the presence of God with them; for fellowship with God the Father, is no other than to have his presence; and so with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ.

When persons, in a natural way, have fellowship with one another, they are together in some place, and enjoy one another's company in eating, drinking, and in conversation. In like manner, fellowship with Jesus Christ, or enjoying his presence, is signified by much the same terms

I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me
(~~418D~~ Revelation 3:20).

And such persons also have communion with the Holy Ghost. For this blessing of grace, the great apostle of the Gentiles earnestly prayed, as one of the greatest that heart can desire. These are his words,

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen
(~~4734~~ 2 Corinthians 13:14).

For God to be with his people, and they to enjoy his presence, is for him *to commune with* them; as he promised to Moses that he would, from *off the mercy seat*, and to whom he granted his gracious presence in a very remarkable manner. He talked with him, as one friend does with another, in a most familiar way. So God, when with his people, affords them his gracious presence, speaks comfortable words unto them, and brings to their remembrance, and home to their souls, his gracious promises; and *a word fitly spoken, is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.* Never does a child of God experience the presence of God more than when he is pleased to bring a promise, and set it home upon the heart with power.

For the Lord to be with his people, and grant his gracious presence, is, to manifest his early loving kindness to their souls. Sometimes they are in darkness, and see no light, God withdraws himself from them, as to the manifestation of his love; though he at other times, with great kindness gathers them, by granting a fresh manifestation of his love. He may be said to be with them, when he speaks to the heart, and says, *I have loved thee, with an everlasting love; therefore with, loving kindness have I drawn thee:* when he *sheds his love abroad in their hearts*, by his Spirit, or directs their hearts into his love: when they are rooted and grounded in his

love, satisfied of their interest in it, and that nothing is able to separate them from it; when he enlarges their hearts to run with cheerfulness in the ways of his commandments; and draws out the desires of their souls to his name, and to the remembrance of him: when he raises their affections, putting in his *finger by the hole of the door*, causing their *bowels to move towards him*; and their *hands drop with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handle of the lock*; that is, when their graces are in lively exercise when it is thus, God is with them, granting his gracious presence. When their faith is in lively exercise; and when they can say with the church, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his*; when their hope is raised to such a degree, as to say, *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, there will I hope in him*. When their love is so strong, as with the Psalmist to say, *I will love thee, O Lord, my God; for thou art my rock and my fortress*; when they thus abound in faith, hope, and love, *through the power of the Holy Ghost*; then may the Lord be said to be with them, and they to enjoy his presence. When in ordinances (hearing the word particularly), they have a spiritual appetite; *find the word and eat it, to the joy and rejoicing of their hearts*; when there is a desire in their souls after the *sincere milk of the Word, that they may grow thereby*, and they feed upon it, and relish it; when they *sit under the shadow of Christ with delight, and his fruit is sweet unto their taste*; when, while the Scriptures of truth are opened, or the Word of God preached, their hearts burn within them; then God is with them, and they enjoy his presence. When Wisdom's ways are experimentally *ways of pleasantness, and her paths, paths of peace*; and the language of their souls is, *Lord, it is good for us to be here*; God is with his people; his presence is with them at such times. And if we know any thing of God's being with us, or to have his presence, it is in such seasons as these.

Now it is a most amazing instance of divine goodness, that God should grant his gracious presence to any of the sons of men, frail, mortal creatures; sinful dust and ashes. He that dwells on high, in whom it is wonderful condescension to look on things in heaven: He, whose throne is in the heavens, and the earth is his footstool! It is an humbling of himself to look to him that *is of a poor and a contrite spirit*. This is grace: but; how much more so, for *the High and the lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, and dwells in the high and holy place, to DWELL with him that is of a poor and a contrite spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones!* It is much he should look on them; but it is far more, it is amazing, that he should DWELL, or take up his abode with them. When

our Lord spake of such as loved him, and kept his commandments, he said, that He and his Father *would come unto them, and make their abode with them*. Therefore said Judas, not Iscariot, *Lord how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?* What reason can he give for it? O, how distinguishing is this favour! This always causes gladness, when it is enjoyed. *Lord lift thou up upon us the light of thy countenance; which will put more joy into our hearts, than when corn and wine increase*. It is with this, God makes his people *joyful in the house of prayer*; where prayer is made, the word preached, and ordinances administered. It is the nearest to heaven, of any thing that is enjoyed upon earth. It is this which sweetens all afflictions, and makes us easy under them. The presence of God is like the tree that was cast into the waters of Marah; it made them sweet. If the Lord be with his people, they can cheerfully go through fire and water. If they *pass through the fire, the flames shall not kindle upon them; or through the waters, the floods shall not overflow them*; If the Angel of God's presence be with them, they can pass through the wilderness; yea, *through the valley of the shadow of death*, without fear. For, (says the Psalmist) *I will fear no evil. Why so? for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me*. This makes every affliction easy; yea, it causes the soul to rejoice; to *glory in tribulation; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope*.

Of all things in the world there is nothing so desirable to a gracious soul, as the presence of God. Hence Moses says, *if thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence*. I do not care where I am, or whither I go, if thy presence go with me; that is his meaning. So David says, *There be many that say, who will shew us any (carnal, temporal) good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us*. That is the thing he was desirous of. So Job in his afflicted circumstances, says, *O that I were as in months past! when the Almighty was yet with me*; which made past days desirable to be returned unto him. Of all things that one good man can wish for another, there is nothing greater than to wish him the presence of God. As Boaz said to his reapers (a very unusual salutation for farmers, to their reapers, in our day), *The Lord be with you*. He could not wish them a greater blessing. And there is nothing greater, for God to give his people, than his presence. He promised Jacob that he would be with him, and was as good as his word. Jacob was greatly thankful for it, as appears when he said, *Let us arise, and go up to Bethel, and I will make there an altar unto*

God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. If God grants his presence with his people, it is an antidote against all fear from every quarter. *Fear not, I am with thee.* Let a man's case be what it may, he will exult and say, in the midst of surrounding dangers, *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob will not forsake us.*

Well, but now the question is, When, or how long will God be with his people? The answer is, *While we are with him.* And can we expect it any longer than while we are with him? no; *The Lord is with you, while ye be with him:* while you keep close to him in a way of duty; while you are with him in prayer particularly; while you ply the throne of grace, and keep close to God there; and this is to be done continually. Our Lord spake a parable to this end, that men ought *always to pray and not to faint.* The apostle directs us to *pray without ceasing;* and elsewhere exhorts, that supplication be made *for all saints, watching thereunto with all perseverance.* Now, if you keep close to God in your closets, in your families, and in public with his saints, God will be with you; but if you *restrain prayer before God,* you must not expect his presence. Is it reasonable you should, while you neglect to approach unto him? I tell you, you must not expect he will be with you, when he never hears from you. He will be with you, while ye are with him; while you are with his worshipping people. if you desert his assembles, he will desert you? Of Judah it is said, *He ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.* While Judah kept close to God, the Lord was with him; he *had power with God, and prevailed.*

God is with us, while we are with his people; while we have communion with them that fear the Lord. God is with them that fear him; and those that keep company with such persons, may expect his presence. This is what makes conversation with the saints desirable. These are *the excellent in the earth,* in whom we should delight. Why so? because God is with them. This is the reason given why *ten men should take hold of the skirts of him that is a Jew* (that is, one inwardly, a spiritual man), *and say, we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.* Now being with the saints, is in some sense, being with God. While you are with his people, conversing, or joining in prayer with them, God will be with you. *They that feared the Lord, spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them, that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.* Saints, when they meet

together, may at first be very lukewarm and indifferent; but by degrees, through spiritual conversation one with another, they become lively. Spiritual conversation is like ruttig fuel to fire: and prayer is like the bellows which blows up the flame; and, ere long, before they are aware, it is with them, as the church says it was with her, when her soul was made like *the chariots of Aminadib*.

I persuade myself some of you remember the times in which it hath been thus with you, in Christian conversation. You have come to it coldly; but by degrees have been refreshed, and have comforted one another. God has been with you. Thus it *was* with the two disciples travelling to Emmaus. They entered upon Christian conversation; began to talk about the sufferings and death of Christ; and while they were thus discoursing, Jesus came and joined them; went on and talked with them; and when he parted from them, they reflected upon what had passed, said, *Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way?* Thus, while saints are with one another, they are with God. While they are praying for one another, and building up one another *on their most holy faith*; God is with them, as he was with the first Christians, when *the house was shaken, and they were filled with the holy Ghost, and great grace was upon them all*.

God will be with you, while ye be with him in public worship, and attend the ordinances of his house. As the primitive Christians experienced, who *continued stedfast in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*. Where God hath recorded his name, *he comes and blesses* his people. Where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is he in the midst of them. He hath promised to be with his ministers and churches to the end of the world: and while you are with them, he will be with you. But I must proceed to inquire,

II. When will the Lord be found of his people? The answer is, When they seek him. And can they expect he should ever be found of them, when they do not seek him? it is not reasonable. If they seek him, he will be found of them.

There is no finding out God unto perfection; that is certain. As Elihu says, *Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out*. Something of God may he found out by the very light of nature: more by the light of divine Revelation; still more by *the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him*. But, after all, there is no finding him out unto perfection: not in his nature, essence, perfections, and purposes: no, nor in

his works of nature and providence. They are past finding out, as Eliphaz says to Job. And New Testament saints agree in this. The great apostle of the Gentiles says, *how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways are past finding out*. Not, only the works of nature and providence are past finding out; but the works of grace are so. The love of God hath heights and lengths, and breadths, and depths, which are not to be found out. **Yet God is to be found by his people.** He is found of them in conversion; found to be their covenant God and Father. He was so from everlasting; but in effectual vocation this appears plainly. Then, under the influence of his Spirit and grace, they are enabled to claim their interest in him, as their covenant God; and he owns, acknowledges, and claims them as his people. He is found of them in Christ, as *gracious and merciful, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin*. So he was found of the poor publican; when under a deep sense of sin, and humiliation for it, he smote upon his breast, and said, *God be merciful to me a sinner*. So he was found of the apostle Paul; when made sensible he was a blasphemer, persecutor, and injurious, he said, *I obtained mercy*. He found God to be gracious and merciful to him.

God is found of his people also at the throne of grace, as a God hearing and answering prayer. For he hath never said to the seed of Jacob, *Seek ye my face in vain*. Sooner or later he always hears the prayers of his people; and sometime, while they are yet speaking. He is found of them as *the God of all grace*, which is his title; and he is able to cause *all grace to abound* towards them. They apply to a throne of grace: they may seek him there, and there they find grace and mercy to help them in all their times of need. He is found of them in his ordinances. This is the desire of their souls, in waiting upon him, that they *may behold the beauty of the Lord*, while they are inquiring in his temple: that they may *see his power and his glory*, as they have sometimes seen him *in the sanctuary*. They are favored with a sight of the footsteps of their King and their God in the sanctuary. There *the glorious Lord is a place of broad rivers and streams* unto them. He *sheds his love abroad in their hearts*; which makes the house of God more eligible than any other place, because there *the Lord is a sun and shield*; there he *gives grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly*. Therefore, *blessed are all they that put their trust in him*.

But when is he found of his people thus? why, when they seek him; that is the answer to the question: *If ye seek him, he will be found of you. It is*

true, indeed, that he is found of some that never sought him; nay, he is always found of his people in the first instant of conversion, before they seek him. I am found of them that sought me not. I am sought of them that asked not for me. Man is quite passive in the first instance of conversion. It is the Lord that finds him. The Great Shepherd looks up his lost sheep, that were scattered in the dark and cloudy day of Adam's fall. It is not in the nature of sheep, that have lost their way, to return to the fold. Hence our Lord, comparing his people to sheep, and himself to a shepherd, says, *How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seek that which is gone astray?* Now, we are like lost sheep, and which should never find the Lord; nay, we should never seek after him, if he did not seek after us. This is more manifest in the parable of the lost goat, recorded in Luke 15. The owner must seek after it, or it will never be found. The woman lights up a candle, sweeps the house, and at last finds it: then she calls her neighbors to rejoice with her. Thus it is in conversion. The Lord is found of them that sought him not.

After conversion, when he is pleased to hide his face from his people, they seek him; and it is often a long time before they find him. It was so with Job: *Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat. Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him.* He made use of all proper means, looking backwards and forwards where he had seen appearances of his providence or of his grace. So the church, when she had lost her beloved, sought him in the broad places and streets. Elsewhere she is represented as seeking him, and could not find him; as *giving* charge to the daughters of Jerusalem, if they found him, to tell him, that she was sick of love. Yet sooner or later the Lord is found by them that seek him: for he has promised it, and he is faithful that hath promised. *Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Those, particularly, that seek him early, shall find him:* i.e. seek him in the first place, and above all things else; that seek him earnestly, and with their whole heart. Some there are that *draw nigh to him with their mouths, and honour him with their lips*, when their hearts are removed far from him. They seem to take delight in seeking *after* God, in asking of him the ordinances of justice; but this is only outward shew. ***However, as for those that seek him with their whole heart, it is promised they shall find him*** (^{<3187>}Proverbs 8:17). Those that draw nigh to him with true hearts, in the

uprightness of their souls; that seek him, as they would any thing the most valuable; such, the wise man says, *shall find the knowledge of God* (~~1016~~ Proverbs 2:5).

They seek after a greater degree of spiritual and experimental knowledge; knowing that *he is a rewarder of them that diligent seek him*: that seek him in a right manner, while and where he may be found. But where may God be found, as merciful and gracious by a depraved and guilty creature? In the Mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ. *He is the way, the truth, and the life no man can come to the Father, but by him*. By him we have access to God, and in no other way. Thus God is to be found in his house, in his ordinances, and among his people, where he often shews himself, and affords his gracious presence. *If ye seek him, he will be found of you*, sooner or later.

III. When does the Lord forsake his people? The answer is, When they forsake him: and as surely as they forsake him, he will forsake them.

Now, in what sense may God be said to forsake his people? There is a sense in which he never does. He promised Joshua, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*. That promise appears to be made, not only to Joshua, but to every believer; for you find it quoted (~~8336~~ Hebrews 13:6.) as a general promise belonging to all the saints, and made use of to encourage the believing Hebrews *to be content with such things* as they had, nor to fear any enemy; but be confident the Lord would be their helper. This therefore, is a common promise, common to all believers; every one may claim it, and take their share in it.

There is therefore a sense in which he will never forsake his people,

Thou, Lord, hast never forsaken them that seek thee
(~~1990~~ Psalm 9:10).

When they are in distress, and make application to him, he will regard them. *When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst; I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. The Lord will not forsake the work of his hands; but will perfect that which concerneth them; will fulfill the pleasure of his goodness in them, and the work of faith with power* upon them. He will carry on the work with power, until the day of Christ. He will not forsake his own people; and the reason is, because they are his inheritance. A man

does not choose to forsake his own inheritance. Did you ever know an instance of it? Now God's people are his inheritance, and he will never forsake them, so as that they shall be lost. They may seem, in their own apprehensions, to be forsaken of him. They may say, with the church, *The Lord hath forsaken me*. But what answer does the Lord give? *Can a woman forget her sucking child; that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? she may, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands, thy walls are continually before me*. The Lord's people may think they are forsaken, when they are not. ***Indeed, they may be forsaken so far, as that God may hide his face from them, or withdraw his gracious presence; as it was with Christ;*** for what befell the Head, it may reasonably be supposed may befall the members. *My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?* God does, for a short time forsake his people.

For a small moment, have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies
will I gather thee (²⁵⁴⁰Isaiah 54:7).

and in the following chapter it is said, *Thou shalt be no more termed forsaken*. *No more*, suggests that they had been forsaken, and were termed so; but they shall not again be termed forsaken. Now this is to be understood of God hiding his face from his people. But when does he this? when they forsake him and his laws.

If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments, then
will I visit their transgression with a rod, and their iniquity with
stripes; nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from
him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail (⁴⁸⁸⁰Psalms 89:30, etc.).

So that you see, God's forsaking his people, upon their forsaking him, is consistent with the continuance of his love to them; and their continuance in his covenant. ***This forsaking therefore respects sensible communion with him, which he is pleased to except them from, by way of rebuke for their iniquities*** for their iniquities separate between them and their God, and cause him to hide his face from them. He forsakes them when they forsake his word, worship, and ordinances. The apostle writing to the Hebrews says, *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some professors is*. This is too much the manner now.

Well then, if you forsake the Lord (for to forsake the assembling of yourselves together, is to forsake him), he will forsake you. To forsake

him, is to forsake the throne of his grace; to restrain prayer before God; and if you continue therein, he will forsake you. You never knew a man, I dare say, in the whole circle of your acquaintance, that ever forsook the word of God and prayer, but that he was left of God, (though a child of his) and manifestly appeared to be in a declining state. This is a well known case, if men forsake the Lord, in either of these senses, he is sure to forsake them, until he hath brought them to a sense of their evil.

I will go and return to my place, until they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early
(~~2015~~ Hosea 5:15).

This forsaking of God is a very great evil, which the people of God fall into through the infirmity of the flesh, the power of unbelief, the temptation of Satan and often times through being immersed in the things of this world. *Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked. What then? He forsook the God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation.* This is a great evil. God is provoked at it, and will shew his displeasure. He resents it by hiding his face from them. *If he forsake him, he will forsake you.*

You see then, if you are desirous of enjoying the presence of God, what is to be done. You must be with him. You must keep close to him, to the throne of his grace, to his people, to his sanctuary, and the ordinances of it. If you depart from these, you are not to expect the presence of God. I am speaking of the sensible communion, which cannot be expected.—Again: What great encouragement here is to seek the Lord. *If ye seek him he will be found of you.* He is to be found, great as he is. He will shew himself to you, if ye seek him. You may be assured of it: he hath promised it. ***In the next place, What care should we take not to offend him, or cause him to hide his face from us!*** So careful you see the church was, when enjoying the most intimate communion with her Lord: when his *left hand was under her head*, and when with his right hand he embraced her, that she said,

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please
(~~2017~~ Song of Solomon 2:7).

O how careful should we be of offending that God, who indulges us in such a manner, as to grant us his gracious presence, which is the greatest favour that can he enjoyed in this world.

Lastly, We should pray for grace and strength to keep close unto him. Our deceitful hearts are apt to start aside from him. Through the corruption of them, the temptations of Satan, and the snares of the world, we are too much carried away; and are ready to depart from God at all times. How earnest then should we be in plying the throne of grace for strength to keep close to him; to walk humbly before him, and a constant dependence upon him.