



Close to Thee



"Thou, my everlasting portion,
more than friend or life to me;
All along my pilgrim journey,
Savior, let me walk with Thee.

"Not for ease or worldly pleasure,
nor for fame my prayer shall be;
Gladly will I toil and suffer,
only let me walk with Thee.

"Lead me thro' the vale of shadows,
bear me o'er life's fitful sea;
Then the gate of life eternal
may I enter, Lord, with Thee.

"Close to Thee, close to Thee,
Close to Thee, close to Thee;
Then the gate of life eternal
may I enter, Lord, with Thee."

The text for this heartfelt hymn was one of many written by Fanny Crosby, with the tune composed by a businessman named Silas Jones Vail. Silas presented the music to Fanny, and the hymn "Close to Thee" was published in 1874. This was the case also with her beloved hymn "Blessed Assurance," where she was able to put Spirit-filled words to a melody composed by another woman of her day named Phoebe Knapp.

Aside from her hymn writing, Fanny also did much writing, including a book she called "Memoirs of 80 Years," in which she talks about the sweetness of God's nearness in this way:

"Toward the close of a day in the year 1874, I was sitting in my room thinking of the nearness of God through Christ as the constant companion of my pilgrim journey, when my heart burst out with the words." Fanny originally called the song, "Christ, the Portion of His People," but she later agreed with Silas Vail that it would be better entitled, "Close to Thee."

We naturally want to be near those we love and care about - so much more the Lord we claim to love. He should be at the center of our lives and thoughts, for He is our "everlasting portion" and we are His beloved possession.

An Old Testament passage that speaks of this relationship is in Deuteronomy 4, where Moses recites in detail how the people of Israel should live in light of all God had shown Himself to be in their history. Take a few moments today if you can to read it, for the reminders and warnings apply to us today. Moses urges them to keep the statutes and judgments he has taught them, just as the Lord God had commanded him, as they prepared to go into the promised land to possess it.

Starting in verse 6 he says, "So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him?'

Then Moses goes on to warn them how easily they might forget all the ways that God had delivered them miraculously from Egypt, and provided this land flowing with milk and honey for them to enjoy. They had been able, by God's power, to conquer the people who lived in that land - those who had worshipped other gods that had no power to save, but to destroy.

In verse 20, Moses gave them the best reason to worship only the God of Israel: "But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today." And many years later, the Apostle Peter wrote to those who believed in Jesus Christ as Messiah - both Jews and Gentiles - in this way:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Peter uses Old Testament concepts to emphasize the privileges of New Testament Christians, so that we can live in the light of who God has made us and saved us to be. We are children of the King, and His prized possession, and have been delivered from the darkness of sin into His marvelous light.

Remember that truth the next time Satan tries to weigh you down with doubts and guilt from the past, for we know that our God is always willing to wipe the slate clean and give us a new chance to walk closely with Him each day. We truly have "a god who is so near whenever we call on Him."