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Sermon preached by Mr F L Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Lord's Day evening July 10th 1960

"Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." Psalm 17:5

We have attempted in our little way, both on Friday and this morning, to consider enduring and continuing to the end. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." (James 1:12) And the same thing this morning, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31,32)

Now if we are exercised in our souls with respect both to our own weakness and to the roughness of the way, the storms in the voyage, the dangers in the desert, it will bring us to this prayer: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." And David here says that the Lord had proved him: "Thou hast proved mine heart; Thou hast visited me in the night; Thou hast tried me." Just those things that we have been speaking about, and "the Lord trieth the righteous." "Grace though the smallest shall surely be tried." "Thou hast tried me and shalt find nothing." It doesn't mean that David thought that the Lord in searching him would find no sin; he knew better than that through the whole of the Psalms. But I take it that this Psalm was written when he was persecuted by Saul, for he prays to be kept from the wicked, "from my deadly enemies, who compass me about." And with respect to Saul, David had no sin. You remember at one time Saul was in David's power. He saw there in the trench that Saul was with Abner and his company asleep, and David took his spear, and when he had taken it, then he called to Abner, and rebuked him for not taking care of his master Saul. It is a beautiful history. And Saul recognised the voice of David; and David said, "Wherefore doth my Lord thus pursue after his servant? for what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand?" (1 Samuel 26:18) I refer to that because in my judgment that is what David had in mind when he said: "Thou hast proved mine heart." O, how David was led about, hunted, persecuted! "Thou hast visited me in the night; Thou hast tried me." David could have taken the life of that enemy Saul, and would have got rid of that persecution and fear. He felt sure that one day he would fall by the hand of Saul, and yet was prevented from slaying Saul.

"Thou hast tried me" – and what a test it was! Just the opposite from Abraham and Isaac. Isaac was Abraham's only and beloved son, and the Lord tested him, tempted him to slay him, and he obeyed. But here was the opposite. The Lord, as it were, brought David to that temptation to slay his enemy and get rid of him, but he stood the test. It was a great test, and so: "Thou hast proved mine heart; Thou hast visited me in the night; Thou hast proved me, tested me, tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress."

But then he looks to the future: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." This is the prayer of one who has lost all confidence in himself, who has been brought to see the end of all perfection in the flesh. If you take notice of the prayers in the Psalms, you will see that they reflect the condition of soul of the one who prays, and O, what an indication we have in prayers of the condition of people's souls! It is a beautiful appointment prayer, beautiful because of its Object. O, how it does shine! David has the Object of faith before him here. Have we ever rightly considered

what prayer really is? The Lord knows everything we have need of; He has a fulness out of which to supply those needs. He needs no information from us. There is no need with God for prayer at all, but it is a method. It is very blessed to take notice not only of the all-sufficiency of grace, but also the methods of grace. Those methods could be otherwise, had it pleased God.

But here is prayer. The Object is God in Christ, God the Eternal Son, in Whom it has pleased the Father and the Holy Ghost that all the fullness should dwell, and that bodily. There is the glorious Object of prayer, the Lord Jesus, the Captain of Salvation. And the one who prays is a poor, dependent, dying sinner, the creature of but a day, by the mysterious power of the Holy Spirit having contact with Him Who is eternal, and through prayer by the Spirit receiving into the heart those imperishable blessings that are in Christ Jesus – the blessings of grace, wisdom to direct our way, strength to do the will of God.

And so David here has before him the remainder of his journey, and we here, some of us, haven't got much farther to go. Some of you young people, if you are spared to see 70 or more years, have got a long journey to go, and it will be a mercy if you are exercised while young in life to perceive both your dependence upon God, and, if you are made a real pilgrim, and if the end and object and centre of your life is the Lord Jesus Christ and His kingdom, His eternal things and Gospel, O blessed, rich, spiritual life! It will sanctify every trouble, will be a refuge in every distress; it will be a harbour in every storm, a high tower, and high Rock when you are overwhelmed. O that the Lord would bless our young people with the light of life, with His saving grace, and set them on pilgrimage! If He does, it will make them both weak and strong, it will make them both fools and yet wise, wise in that wisdom which is above the world.

"Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." And I have seen something very solemn, very expressive in that word "goings." "Hold up my goings." For from the moment we are born, we commence goings, we commence a journey. Nobody can stand still and indeed, if you stand still, you are going. Since we have been in this chapel, our goings have been towards an hour. If one should sit in a pew all their lives, they would go on, mortal decay, grey hairs and old age and eternity would come. We are going. But in these goings, there is the whole of the providence of God without, and if we are called by grace, there will be the goings of the work of the Holy Ghost within, and these two things together are very blessed, and bring our mind to that declaration of divine sovereignty: "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof (the whole of the goings thereof) is of the Lord." (Proverbs 16:33)

And not only so, it is personal: "Hold up **my** goings." And although as we read in that blessed 84th Psalm: "Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God", and all His redeemed who are brought to wander in the wilderness in a solitary way because they have no city to dwell in, all that He leads forth in the right way to heaven will get there, but their goings are all different and all personal. And so the Lord said to Daniel in his perilous times, for the Lord interpreted many things and dreams to Daniel. But there were some things that God was pleased to hide from him, and that was the future of his goings, and also the end of these perils. "What shall be the end of these things?" says Daniel. Ah, said the Lord, "Go thy way...many shall be purified, and made white, and tried." (Daniel 12:9,10) You think of it in connection with what we have been trying to speak – in those terrible times the Lord would so be in it, so dispose of events, so sanctify trials and perils, that "many shall be purified,

and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly." Whatever happens, the wicked shall do wickedly. "But go thou thy way, Daniel." Thy way – don't attempt to go anybody else's way; whatever is appointed for you in that way – "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shall rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." (v.13)

And here faith, looking at its own weakness and the mighty power of the enemy, the world, and the flesh and the devil, seeks refuge in God: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." These goings in providence may be very painful. We don't know what the Lord has prepared for us. We are in health today comparatively; we may be in the hospital next week. Things may be well with us in our domestic life; we don't know what trouble may come into our homes. Things may be well with us in our circumstances, but we may be much impoverished. But "Hold up my goings" wherever in Thy divine sovereignty Thou shalt lead me in Thy paths. That is to say, "May I be kept in Thy paths in the midst of my goings." That is the emphasis here, as I see it, in the prayer. It is **my** goings, but **Thy** paths. And we cannot change with anybody, my friends. No, "Whatever cross lies at thy door" – not the one next door to you – "it cometh from the Lord." (335) and there is something very encouraging, and will enable one to continue in the Gospel – there is, indeed – because it embraces the whole of the promises of the Gospel. "Hold up my goings in Thy paths." Well, says the Lord, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be." (Deuteronomy 33:25) There is one gracious answer to this anxious prayer.

In the 37th Psalm we read this comfortable word: "The Lord knoweth the days of the upright" – knows what sort of days they are, and what particular day we are passing through, whether it is a day of trouble, a day of sorrow, of loss, of persecution, of peril. "The Lord knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever." But "as thy days, so shall thy strength be." When you have no need of much strength and things are going smoothly and favourably, you will not have that supply of grace that you will need in a storm, in a sorrow and conflict, when you come to engage the enemy, but the promise stands, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

So, "Hold up my goings in Thy paths." What a prayer this is for our young, people! O, that they were taught to pray, and that the Lord would give them that answer that He gave to Jacob! What an answer to the prayer of the text this would be: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths" – "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." (Genesis 28:15) O, what a rich promise that is, what an answer to this prayer! I, the High and Holy One; I, infinite in wisdom, Whose understanding is unsearchable; Who am Lord of Lords and King of Kings; I, Who know the end from the beginning; I, Who have appointed every turn of the way; Whose divine sovereignty has ordered everything concerning your providence; I am with thee, and will keep thee, and that in all places. Not all places except one, but ALL places. And the Lord knows where they are. Those of you who are young, O, that He might preserve you; and if you are His in a very special way, He knows all places that you will come into to the end of your life. "I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee." Think of it: "I am with thee, and will keep thee, and will not leave thee until, I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." What an answer to the text!

"Hold up my goings in Thy paths." We shall need shoes of iron and brass, and that is the preparation of the Gospel: "shod with the preparation of the Gospel. And not only these shoes in order to stand the rough journey – they are studded with iron and brass, promises, shalls and wills, firm as the everlasting hills, reinforced and strengthened by the shalls and wills of Jehovah. O how safe a pilgrim is! "Hold up my goings in Thy paths."

But then there will be a holding up with respect to the internal work of grace, and we need to be held up in this. Indeed, this is the secret whereby His people endure to the end. The beginning of these goings of the soul is when one is born again. And I believe, and that from my little experience, that Mr. Hart is right when he says: "From that moment the conflict begins" – not ends. When one is born again, made a new creature in Christ Jesus, possessed of spiritual life and grace, from that moment the conflict begins, because until then the world was no enemy, sin was no enemy, the flesh was not in enmity, because there was no spirit. But immediately the heart is changed, the will renewed, the feet turned to Zion's hill, then the world, the flesh, and the devil become mortal enemies to the soul, and we shall need this prayer, we shall need that life that the Lord has given, that He will maintain it. One thing we are apt to overlook and be mistaken in, which causes many doubts and fears, is that none of the graces of the Spirit are in us as to the source. If we possess the life of God within, that life is hid with Christ in God. We need Him to maintain it, and He will. If we possess the grace of God in our hearts, nothing can take that grace out of us, for the source of it is in Christ in heaven. We need to be continually renewed and refilled and supplied from the blessed fulness that is in Christ Jesus, and therefore we are dependent upon Him. Hence the need of prayer. O, the connection that the wisdom of God has made between the blessings God designs to give and the work of the Spirit in prayer! Prayer for these blessings in the heart is a very gracious exercise, and it keeps faith alive, it keeps the sword and armour bright; and the more we have to pass through, the more lively is our spirit. Hold up my goings in a path of prayer.

There are many things that would stop and stifle prayer. The Lord's silence would, the devil's roaring would. David said he almost dwelt in silence. But where the life of God is it will assert itself, and that with more energy the greater extremity it is brought into. And some of you know it in experience. O, there is something very sweet and sacred to feel any experience of the vital things of God in the soul! Notions work nothing; there is nothing savoury, vital, living or substantial in it. And do you, my friends, from time to time feel that peculiar, mysterious, sacred influence upon your very soul, that you feel a vital spark of heavenly life, and a ray of heavenly light, in your understanding, that you know the Lord under a sense of your need of Him, and the attractions of His Person, His beauty, His glory, His kingdom, His grace? Now we need to be held up in these inward goings and work of the Holy Ghost.

Because there is backsliding, there are spiritual decays; there is a leaving of our first love, as was said to the Church at Ephesus: "Thou hast left thy first love" – not lost it. There is a forsaking of living waters, and hewing to ourselves broken cisterns. O, how sadly a sinner can backslide from the Lord, how far he can wander! And when thus far off from the Lord, the Lord at times brings a poor sinner to his senses without restoring his soul – and that is the time you will pray this prayer. Perhaps some of you know what that is, when you have wandered to the ends of the earth, destroyed yourself, sinned away your comfort in experience of His promises, sinned away your hearings so that you come and go to the House of God and get nothing, sinned away your reading of the Scriptures,

and your liberty in prayer, and the Lord awakens you to your condition without restoring the joy of your salvation. And you will wonder whether you were ever called by grace, and whether the Lord's mercy isn't clean gone for ever; you will wonder whether you will ever pray again, whether you will ever know the joy of salvation. You look back to former days. Well, we need to be held up in all the work of the Spirit in our hearts.

"Hold up my goings in Thy paths." Then there is the path that runs through the Word of God – His paths. Have you ever loved the Bible? This is unique, incomparable, this sacred Volume, and there runs through this the paths of the Lord. There is a revelation of all that is necessary to be known of Him, profitable for doctrine, for instruction in righteousness, for reproof, for correction, but we need to be upheld in His paths that run through the Word of God. How do we read it? It is a great thing to be brought inside of it, into the paths of truth. You take the Epistles where we get the very quintessence of the Gospel, concentrated truth. O, the richness of the Epistles, perhaps especially that to the Hebrews, which shows the paths of the Lord, His Priesthood, and the excellency of His Priesthood and Sacrifice, that, being Who He is, only one sacrifice was necessary, "and that by one sacrifice He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." And sometimes you are gathered right in that stream, that path of truth, and feel the vital life penetrate your soul and your very affections and heart and soul to be all taken up in the Lord Jesus as you trace His goings through the Scriptures.

But when His goings are made our goings, they blend together so that they become one. Perhaps the Song of Solomon is the most sacred illustration of that – so intimate is the union and the love there, that it is difficult to know whether it is the Lord speaking or the Church. And for the most part it matters little which it is, the union is so close. All that the Lord Jesus is He is to the Church, and all His beauty in the Church is all the desire of His soul. Speaking of the Lord Jesus in the 16th Psalm, He says: "The lines are fallen unto Me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." Now this the Church says, and it is prophetic of the Lord Jesus Himself, so that the work of the Holy Ghost in the soul and the goings of the Lord traced out by the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures, are so joined together that there are times when you can truly believe what the Psalmist concludes with here: "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness." This was his object, and it is as though he says here: "Hold up my goings until I get there, and am satisfied by awaking with Thy likeness. There is nothing here that attracted me. Whom have I in heaven beside Thee?"

So that when the blessed work of the Holy Ghost in the soul, and the goings of the Lord Jesus as the Mediator, His goings in casting up a highway to heaven in His doings, His sufferings, His obedience, His death, when the benefits of them flow into the heart of a poor sinner, they are so united – the Lord's goings and the sinner's goings both unite in the paths of truth. What a unity! We pray in the hymn sometimes that we might be all taken up with Him.

"Hold up my goings in Thy paths." And you need to be held up, too, in a profession of religion, to hold it fast and not let it go. Speaking for myself, which perhaps is an experience that you cannot fully enter into, how I do need the Lord to hold up my goings in the path of the ministry, that I might continue. It isn't easy, my friends. It may appear to you to be easy. It might be just to talk, but to feel what Moses felt – he asked the Lord to consider – it almost looked like irreverence – he said to

the Lord: "Lord, consider that this nation is Thy people." That was the responsibility he felt that he, instrumentally, was to lead the people through the wilderness to Canaan. And a minister, if he is in his right place and ordained of God, is the under-shepherd, and through the preaching should lead people in their experience through the wilderness to heaven. O, how we need to be held up in the path of the ministry that our footsteps slip not! Therefore, whether hearing or speaking, the Apostle says: We ought to give the more earnest heed...lest at any time we should let them slip" – that is, the truths of the Gospel. (Hebrews 2:1) "Hold up my goings in Thy paths."

Well, the last path that we shall have to tread is the valley of the shadow of death. O, to be upheld when we come there! Dear David was. O, how this prayer was answered in his case, yea, not only when he was lying down and enjoying the green pastures; yea, not only when you are sitting in a chapel pew, and see the blessed goings of the Lord in the sanctuary, and feel something of His heavenly presence in your heart. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." There was a reason for it, and you will be able to give a reason for everything you profess and say. If you cannot give a reason for it, then don't say it. The reason was this: "For Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the House of the Lord for ever." So David's prayer here was abundantly answered. "Hold up my goings" – wherever they take me, however painful, however mysterious, however deep, however hot the furnace, however deep the river, keep me in Thy paths. I wish I could express it, but in looking back I can feel it. Those of you who may be passing through much distress, or oppression, or persecution, or adversity, to feel that when you are in it, that is your goings, yet in those goings you are preserved in God's paths, preserved in the path of prayer, of worship, of the Scriptures.

"That my footsteps slip not." Perhaps you feel too firm in the truth to slip. If you do, I would remind you of the words of the Lord: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12) My friends, God knows that this is true, that I have feared and almost daily prayed that He prevent that I shall yet make shipwreck of faith. It is possible, O it is indeed, to fall from the pulpit into hell; it is a very solemn thing! My preaching will avail me nothing at the end. It will be no criterion. It will not be accepted as credentials that I should name my preaching at last. O, how we need to be held up if our footsteps slip! But David said: "When I said, My foot slippeth; Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up." (Psalm 94:18) He had got nothing to boast of in himself. David and all the ransomed throng will be brought to the end, and will all shout: "Grace, grace unto it." Sometimes we feel:

"Then loudest of the crowd I'll sing,
While heaven's resounding mansions ring
With shouts of sovereign grace."

(Gadsby's 938)

Amen.