

The Essential Elements of Christian Experience

by Charles Finney

The essential element of Christian experience is hunger and thirst after righteousness, a real longing for spiritual purity that implies conversion and a clear conception of the need for a perfectly cleansed heart.

Scripture: Psalm 42:1-2, Isaiah 55:1-2, Matthew 5:6, John 6:35, John 7:37-38, Romans 8:1-2, Philippians 3:9, Hebrews 11:6, 1 Peter 2:2, 2 Peter 1:4

Topics: "Righteousness", "Spiritual Hunger"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the essential elements of Christian experience, focusing on the deep spiritual hunger and thirst for righteousness that leads to true fulfillment in Christ. He explains that this longing is not merely about seeking relief from guilt or sin but is a profound desire for spiritual purity and union with God. Finney illustrates the struggle between the natural appetites and spiritual desires, highlighting the necessity of recognizing one's own weakness and the importance of faith in receiving God's righteousness. He encourages believers to persistently seek a deeper relationship with God, assuring them that true satisfaction comes from being filled with His righteousness. Ultimately, Finney calls for a transformation that leads to a life of holiness and a desire to share this experience with others.

Transcript

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." -- Matt. v. 6.

THERE are a great many things in the experience of Christians, which, traced out in their natural history, are exceeding interesting. I have been struck to notice how very commonly what is peculiar to Christian experience drops out of the mind; while that which is merely incidental remains, and constitutes the mind's entire conception of what religion is. Their way of talking of their experience leaves you quite in the dark as to its genuineness, even when they propose to give you especially the reasons of their hope.

My design is first to state some of the facts which belong to the life of God in the soul.

1. Hunger and thirst are states of mind, and do not belong to the body. They are of two kinds, natural and spiritual. The objects on which the natural terminates are food and drink. By our very constitution these are necessary to our well-being in the present world. These appetites are natural and terminate on their appropriate objects.

There are also spiritual hunger and spiritual thirst, which are as truly natural as the former. It is no more a figure of speech to use these terms in this case than in the other.

The appetites that demand food and drink are facts and experiences. Everybody knows what it is to have them, and everybody knows in general what those things are which are so related to the human constitution as to meet those demands.

So also the spiritual appetites are not less things of fact and experience, and stand in like manner related to the objects which are adapted to the demand.

2. Sin is a fact in the natural history of our race. That it is so, must be attributed to the fall of our first parents. Yet whatever explanation be given of the introduction of sin into the human family, it now exists as an undeniable fact.

Some attention to the manner in which sin is first developed, may serve to show its relations to what I have called the natural history of the race.

We all know it to be a fact that the natural appetites commence their development immediately after the natural birth. The first awakening to a conscious existence in this world seems to be, if not occasioned by, yet closely connected with, a constitutional demand for food. The alternations of demand and supply commence and go on while health continues -- all the time developing the strength of this class of appetites. Commonly the natural make their development far in advance of the spiritual.

Not much is said in the Bible as to the mode in which sin entered our world and acquired such relations to the human soul, but it is distinctly referred to Adam's first sin, and is asserted to be in some way connected with that event. Facts show that sin has become in a most significant sense natural to the race, so that they all spontaneously, not of necessity, yet spontaneously, if no special grace interpose, begin to sin as soon as they begin to act morally, or in other words, as soon as they become capable of moral action. Not that men are born sinners, not that they sin before they are born, not that sin is born in them, nor that they are beyond their control born into sin; but yet the constitution of the man -- body and mind -- is such, and the law of development is such, that men sin naturally (none the less voluntarily, responsibly, and guiltily), but they all sin of free choice; the temptations to sin being developed in advance of those intellectual and moral powers which should counteract the excessive demands of the sensibility. Mark the developments of the new-born child. Some pain or some appetite awakens its consciousness of existence, and thus is created a demand for the things it perceives itself to need. Then the little infant begins to struggle for good -- for that particular good which its new-developed sensibility demands. Want, the struggling demand for supply, and the gratification, form a process of development which gives such power to the sensibility as generates ere long an intense selfishness; and before the conscience and the reason are perceptibly developed, have laid the foundation for spiritual death. If the Spirit of God does not excite spiritual wants and arouse the mind to efforts in obtaining them, the mind becomes so engrossed and its sensibilities acquire such habits of control over the will, that when the idea of right and wrong is first developed the mind remains dead to its demands. The appetites have already secured the ascendancy. The mind seems to act as if scarcely aware that it has a soul or any spiritual wants. The spiritual consciousness is at first not developed at all. The mind seems not to know its spiritual relations. When this knowledge first forces itself upon the mind, it finds the ground pre-occupied, the habits fixed, the soul too much engaged for earthly good to be called off. The tendency of this law of development is altogether downward; the appetites become more and more despotic and imperious; the mind has less and less

regard for God. The mind comes into a state in which spiritual truth frets and chafes it, and of course it thoroughly inclines to spiritual apathy -- choosing apathy, though not unaware of its danger before the perpetual annoyance of unwelcome truths. This tends toward a state of dead insensibility to spiritual want.

The first symptom of change is the soul's awaking to spiritual consequences. Sometimes this is feeble at first, or sometimes it may be more strongly aroused to its spiritual relations, position, and wants. This brings on anxiety, desire, a deep sense of what the soul truly needs. From this arises an influence which begins to counteract the power of appetite. It begins to operate as a balance and check to those long unrestrained demands.

Here you may notice that just in proportion as the spiritual consciousness is developed, the mind becomes wretched, for in this proportion the struggle becomes intense and violent. Before, the man was dead. He was like an animal as to the unchecked indulgence of appetite -- above the mere animal in some things, but below in others. He goes on without that counteracting influence which arises from the spiritual consciousness. You see some who live a giddy, aimless life. They seem not at all aware that they have a spiritual nature or any spiritual wants. When they awake to spiritual consciousness and reflection, conviction produces remorse and agony. This spiritual struggle, at whatever age it may occur, is in its general character the same as occurs in the infant when its spiritual consciousness is first awakened.

It is but natural that when the spiritual faculties are aroused, men will begin to pray and struggle under a deep sense of being wrong and guilty. At first this may be entirely selfish. But before conversion takes place, there will be a point in which the counter influences of the selfish against the spiritual will balance each other, and then the spiritual will gain the ascendancy. The animal and the selfish must relatively decline and the spiritual gain strength, till victory turns on the side of the spiritual powers. How commonly do you observe that when the mind becomes convicted of sin, the attractions of the world fade away; all it can give looks small; sinners can no longer take the pleasure in worldly things they once had. Indeed, this is a most curious and singular struggle. How rapid and great are the changes through which the sinner passes! Today, he quenches the light of God in his soul, and gropes on in darkness; tomorrow the light may return and reveal yet greater sin; one day he relapses back to worldliness, and gives up his soul to his own thoughts and pleasures; but ere another has passed, there is bitterness in this cup and he loathes it, and from his soul cries out: This can never satisfy an immortal mind! Now he begins to practice upon external reformation; but anon he finds that this utterly fails to bring peace to his soul. He is full of trouble and anxiety for salvation, yet all his struggles thus far have been entirely selfish, and ere he is converted he must see this to be the case. He is in a horrible pit of miry clay. The more he struggles the deeper he sinks and the more desperate his case becomes. Selfish efforts for spiritual relief are just like a quagmire of thick clay. Each struggle plunges the sinking man the deeper in the pit. The convicted man is ready to put himself to hard labor and mighty effort. At first he works with great hope of success, for he does not readily understand why selfish efforts will not be successful. He prays, but all in a selfish spirit. By this I mean that he thinks only of himself. He has no thought of honoring or pleasing God -- no thought of any benefit to his fellow-beings. He does not inquire whether his course of life and state of heart are such that God can bless him without detriment to the rest of His great family. In fact, he does not think of caring for the rest of that family nor for the honor of its great Father. Of course, such selfish praying brings no answer; and when he finds this to be the case, he frets and struggles more than ever. Now he goes on to add to his works and efforts. He attends more meetings, and reads his Bible more, and tries new forms of prayer. All is in vain. His heart is selfish still. What can I do? he cries out in agony; if I pray I am selfish, and if I desist from prayer, this too is selfish; if I read my Bible or neglect to read it, each alike is selfish,

and what can I do? How can I help being selfish?

Alas, he has no idea of acting from any other or higher motive than his own interests. It is his darkness on this very point that makes the sinner's struggle so long and so unprofitable. This is the reason why he can not be converted at once, and why he must needs sink and flounder so much longer in the quagmire of unavailing and despairing works. It is only when he comes at last to see that all this avails nothing, that he begins to take some right views of his case and of his relations. When he learns that indeed he can not work out his own salvation by working at it on this wise he bethinks himself to inquire whether he be not all wrong, at bottom -- whether his motives of heart are not radically corrupt. Looking round and abroad, he begins to ask whether God may not have some interests and some rights as well as himself. Who is God and where is He? Who is Jesus Christ and what has He done? What did He die for? Is God a great King over all the earth, and should He not have due honor and homage? Was it this great God who so loved the world as to give His Son to die for it? O, I see I have quite neglected to think of God's interests and honor! Now I see how infinitely mean and wicked I have been! Plainly enough, I can not live so. No wonder God did not hear my selfish prayers. There was no hope in that sort of effort, for I had, as I plainly see, no regard to God in anything I was doing then. How reasonable it is that God should ask me to desist from all my selfish endeavors and to put away this selfishness itself, and yield myself entirely and forever to do or suffer all His blessed will!

It is done; and now this long-troubled soul sinks into deep repose. It settles itself down at Jesus' feet, content if only Christ be honored and God's throne made glorious. The final result -- whether saved or lost -- seems to give him no longer that agonizing solicitude; the case is submitted to the Great Disposer in trustful humility. God will do all things well. If He takes due care of His own interests and glory, there will be no complaining -- nothing but deep and peaceful satisfaction.

In the case of most young converts, this state of peaceful trust in God is subject to interruptions. The natural appetites have been denied -- their dominion over the will disowned; but they are not dead. By and by they rise to assert their sway. They clamor for indulgence, and sometimes they get it. Alas, the young convert has fallen into sin! His soul is again in bondage and sorrow. O, how deeply is he mortified to think that he has again given away to temptation, and pierced the bosom on which he loved to recline! He had promised himself he should never sin, but he has sinned, and well for him if he finds no heart to evade or deny the fact. Better admit it all, and most freely, although it wounds his heart more than all his former sins. Mark his agony of spirit! His tears of repentance were never before so bitter! He feels disappointed, and it almost seems to him that this failure must blast all his plans and hopes of leading a Christian life. It does not work as he thought it would. He feels shy of God; for he says, How can God ever trust me again after such developments of unfaithfulness. He can hardly get himself to say a word to God or to Christ. He is almost sure that he has been deceived. But finally he bethinks himself of the Cross of Calvary, and catches a faint ray of light -- a beam of the light of love. He says, There may be mercy for me yet! I will at least go to Jesus and see. Again he goes, and again he falls into those arms of love and is made consciously welcome. The light of God shines on his soul again, and he find himself once more an accepted son in his Father's presence.

But here a new form of desire is awakened. He has learned something of his own weakness and has tasted the bitterness of sin. With an agony of interest never known before, he asks, Can I ever become established in holiness? Can I have righteousness enough to make me stand in the evil day? This is a new form of spiritual desire, such as our text expresses in the words "hunger and thirst after righteousness."

These extended remarks are only an introduction to my general subject, designed to get before your mind the true idea of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. This state of mind is not merely conviction; it is not remorse, nor sorrow, nor a struggle to obtain a hope or to get out of danger. All these feelings may have preceded, but the hungering after righteousness is none of these. It is a longing desire to realize the idea of spiritual and moral purity. He has in some measure appreciated the purity of heaven, and the necessity of being himself as pure as the holy there, in order to enjoy their bliss and breathe freely in their atmosphere.

This state of mind is not often developed by writers, and it seems rarely to have engaged the attention of the Church as its importance demands.

When the mind gets a right view of the atmosphere of heaven, it sees plainly it can not breathe there, but must be suffocated, unless its own spirit is congenial to the purity of that world. I remember the case of a man who, after living a Christian life for a season, relapsed into sin. At length God reclaimed His wandering child. When I next saw him, and heard him speak of his state of relapse, he turned suddenly away and burst into tears, saying, "I have been living in sin, almost choked to death in its atmosphere; it seemed as if I could not breathe in it. It almost choked the breath of spiritual life from my system."

Have not some of you known what this means? You could not bear the infernal atmosphere of sin -- so like the very smoke of the pit! After you get out of it, you say, Let me never be there again! Your soul agonizes and struggles to find some refuge against this awful relapsing into sin. O, you long for a pure atmosphere and a pure heart, that will never hold fellowship with darkness or its works again.

The young convert, like the infant child, may not at first distinctly apprehend its own condition and wants; but such experience as I have been detailing develops the idea of perfect purity, and then the soul longs for it with longings irrepressible. I must, says the now enlightened convert, I must be drawn into living union with God as revealed in Jesus Christ. I can not rest till I find God, and have Him revealed to me as my everlasting refuge and strength.

Some years since, I preached a sermon for the purpose of developing the idea of the spiritual life. The minister for whom I preached said to me, I want to show you a letter written many years ago by a lady now in advanced age, and detailing her remarkable experience on this subject. After her conversion she found herself exceedingly weak, and often wondered if this was all the stability and strength she could hope for from Christ in His Gospel. Is this, she said, all that God can do for me? Long time and with much prayer she examined her Bible. At last she found, that below what she had ever read and examined before, there lay a class of passages which revealed the real Gospel -- salvation from sinning. She saw the provisions of the Gospel in full relief. Then she shut herself up, determined to seek this blessing till she should find. Her soul went forth after God, seeking communion with Him, and the great blessing which she so deeply felt that she needed. She had found the needed promises in God's Word, and now she held on upon them as if she could not let them go until they had all been fulfilled in her own joyful experience. She cried mightily to God. She said, "If Thou dost not give me this blessing, I can never believe Thee again." In the issue the Lord showed her that the provisions were already made, and were just as full and as glorious as they needed to be or could be, and that she might receive them by faith if she would. In fact, it was plain that the Spirit of the Lord was pressing upon her acceptance, so that she had only to believe -- to open wide her mouth that it might be filled. She saw and obeyed: then she became firm and strong. Christ had made her free. She was no longer in bondage; her Lord had absolutely enlarged her soul in faith and love, and triumphantly she could exclaim: Glory be to God! Christ hath made me free.

The state of mind expressed by hungering and thirsting is a real hunger and thirst, and terminates for its object upon the bread and water of life. These figures (if indeed they are to be regarded as figures at all) are kept up fully throughout the Bible, and all true Christians can testify to the fitness of the language to express the idea.

I have said that this state of mind implies conversion; for although the awakened sinner may have agonies and convictions, yet he has no clear conceptions of what this union with Christ is, nor does he clearly apprehend the need of a perfectly cleansed heart. He needs some experience of what holiness is, and often he seems also to need to have tasted some of the exceeding bitterness of sin as felt by one who has been near the Lord, before he shall fully apprehend this great spiritual want of being made a partaker indeed of Christ's own perfect righteousness. By righteousness here, we are not to understand something imputed, but something real. It is imparted, not imputed. Christ draws the souls of His people into such union with Himself, that they become "partakers of the divine nature," or as elsewhere expressed, "partakers of His holiness." For this the tried Christian pants. Having had a little taste of it, and then having tasted the bitterness of a relapse into sin, his soul is roused to most intense struggles to realize this blessed union with Christ.

A few words should now be said on what is implied in being filled with this righteousness.

Worldly men incessantly hunger and thirst after worldly good. But attainment never outstrips desire. Hence, they are never filled. There is always a conscious want which no acquisition of this sort of good can satisfy. It is most remarkable that worldly men can never be filled with the things they seek. Well do the Scriptures say -- This desire enlarges itself as hell, and is never satisfied. They really hunger and thirst the more by how much the more they obtain.

Let it be especially remarked that this being filled with righteousness is not perfection in the highest sense of this term. Men often use the term perfection, of that which is absolutely complete -- a state which precludes improvement and beyond which there can be no progress. There can be no such Perfection among Christians in any world -- earth or heaven. It can pertain to no being but God. He, and He alone, is perfect beyond possibility of progress. All else but God are making progress -- the wicked from bad to worse, the righteous from good to better. Instead of making no more progress in heaven, as some suppose, probably the law of progress is in a geometrical ratio; the more they have, the farther they will advance. I have often queried whether this law which seems to prevail here will operate there, viz., of what I may call impulsive progression. Here we notice that the mind from time to time gives itself to most intense exertion to make attainments in holiness. The attainment having been made, the mind for a season reposes, as if it had taken its meal and awaited the natural return of appetite before it should put forth its next great effort. May it not be that the same law of progress obtains even in heaven?

Here we see the operations of this law in the usual Christian progress. Intense longing and desire beget great struggling and earnest prayer; at length the special blessing sought is found, and for the time the soul seems to be filled to overflowing. It seems to be fully satisfied and to have received all it supposed possible and perhaps even more than was ever asked or thought. The soul cries out before the Lord, I did not know there was such fullness in store for Thy people. How wonderful that God should grant it to such an one as myself! The soul finds itself swallowed up and lost in the great depths and riches of such a blessing.

Oh, how the heart pours itself out in the one most expressive petition: "Thy will be done on earth as in heaven!" All prayer is swallowed up in this. And then the praise, the FULLNESS OF PRAISE! All struggle and agony are suspended: the soul seems to demand a rest from prayer that it may pour itself out in one mighty tide of praise. Some suppose that persons in this state will never again experience those longings after a new baptism; but in this they mistake. The meal they have had may last them a considerable time -- longer, perhaps, than Elijah's meal, on the strength of which he went forty days; but the time of comparative hunger will come round again, and they will gird themselves for a new struggle.

This is what is sometimes expressed as a baptism, an anointing, an unction, an ensembling of the Spirit, an earnest of the Spirit. All these terms are pertinent and beautiful to denote this special work of the Divine Spirit in the heart.

They who experience it, know how well and aptly it is described as eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Lord Jesus, so really does the soul seem to live on Christ. It is also the bread and the water of life which are promised freely to him that is athirst. These terms may seem very mystical and unmeaning to those who have had no experience, but they are all plain to him who has known in his own soul what they mean. If you ask why figures of speech are used at all to denote spiritual things, you have the answer in the exigencies of the human mind in regard to apprehending spiritual things. Christ's language must have seemed very mystical to His hearers, yet was it the best He could employ for His purpose. If any man will do His will, he shall know of His doctrine; but how can a selfish, debased, besotted, and withal disobedient mind expect to enter into the spiritual meaning of this language. How strangely must Christ's words have sounded on the ears of Jewish priests: "God in us;" "The Holy Ghost dwelling in you;" "Ye shall abide in Me." How could they understand these things? "The bread that came down from heaven," what could this mean to them? They thought they understood about the manna from heaven, and they idolized Moses; but how to understand what this Nazarene said about giving them the true bread from heaven which should be for the life of the world, they could not see. No wonder they were confounded, having only legal ideas of religion, and having not even the most remote approximation to the idea of a living union with the Messiah for the purposes of spiritual life.

What are the conditions of receiving this fullness?

That the soul hunger and thirst for it, is the only condition specified in this passage. But we know it is very common to have promises made in the Bible, and yet not have all the conditions of the promise stated in the same connection. If we find them elsewhere, we are to regard them as fixed conditions, and they are to be understood as implied where they are not expressed.

Elsewhere we are told that faith is a fundamental condition. Men must believe for it and receive it by faith. This is as naturally necessary as receiving and eating wheat bread is for the sustenance of the body. Ordinary food must be taken into the system by our own voluntary act. We take and eat; then the system appropriates. So faith receives and appropriates the bread of life.

In general it is found true that before Christians will sufficiently apprehend the relations of this supply to their wants and to the means of supplying them, this hunger and thirst becomes very intense, so as to overpower and cast into insignificance all their other appetites and desires. As by a general law one master passion throws all minor ones into the shade, and may sometimes suspend them for a season entirely, so we find in this case a soul intensely hungering and thirsting after righteousness almost forgets to hunger and thirst even after its common food and drinks. Place before him his study-books, he can not

bring his mind to relish them now. Invite him to a singing-concert, he has no taste that way at present. Ask him into company, his mind is pressing in another direction. He longs to find God, and can take but little interest in any other friend at present. Offer him worldly society, and you will find he takes the least possible interest in it. He knows such companions will not understand what his soul so intensely craves, and of course it were vain to look for sympathy in that quarter.

It is an important condition that the mind should have somewhat clear apprehensions of the thing needed and of the means of obtaining it. Effort can not be well directed unless the subject be in some good measure understood. What is that en sealing of the Spirit? What is this baptism? I must by all means see what this is before I can intelligently seek it and hope to gain it. True, no man can know before experience as he can and will know afterwards; but he can learn something before and often much more after the light of experience shines in upon his soul. There is no more mystification than there is in hungering for a good dinner, and being refreshed by it after you have eaten it.

Again, if we would have this fullness, we must be sure to believe this promise and all this class of promises. We must regard them as truly promises of God -- all yea and amen in Christ Jesus, and as good for our souls to rely upon as the promise of pardon to the penitent and believing.

Yet again we must ask and insist upon their fulfillment to our souls. We are authorized to expect it in answer to our faith. We should be first certain that we ask in sincerity, and then should expect the blessing just as we always expect God to be faithful to His word. Why not? Has He said and shall He not do it? Has He promised and shall He not perform?

We must believe that the promise implies a full supply. Our faith must not limit the power or the grace of Christ. The Christian is not straitened in God. Let him take care, therefore, that he do not straiten himself by his narrow conceptions of what God can do and loves to do for His hungering and thirsting children. Often there is need of great perseverance in the search for this blessing. Because of the darkness of the mind and the smallness of its faith the way may not for a long time be prepared for the full bestowment of this great blessing.

REMARKS.

1. The Antinomian Perfectionists mistook the meaning of this and of similar passages. They supposed that whoever believes gets so filled as never to thirst any more. But the fact is, the mind may rise higher and higher, making still richer attainments in holiness at each rising grade of progress. It may indeed find many resting-places, as Bunyan gives to his pilgrim -- here at the top of the hill Difficulty, there on the Delectable Mountains, where he passes through scenes of great triumph, great faith and great joy in God. Subsequently to these scenes will occur other periods of intense desire for new baptisms of the Spirit and for a new ascent upon the heights of the divine life. This is to be the course of things so long at least as we remain in the flesh, and perhaps forever. Perhaps the blest spirits in heaven will never reach a point beyond which there shall not be the same experience -- new developments of God made to the mind, and by this means new stages of progress and growth in holiness. With what amazement shall we then study these stages of progress, and admire to look abroad over the new fields of knowledge successively opened, and the corresponding developments of mental power and of a holy character, all which stand related to these manifestations of God as effects to their cause. What new and glorious views have been bursting upon us, fast as we could bear them, for myriads of ages! Looking back over the past, we shall say -- Oh, this everlasting progress -- this is indeed the blessedness of heaven! How far does this

transcend our highest thought when we looked forward to heaven from the dim distance of our earthly pilgrimage! Here there is no end to the disclosures to be made, nor to the truths to be learned.

If there was no more food, how could there be any more spiritual thirst and spiritual hunger? How, indeed, could there be more spiritual joy? Suppose that somewhere in the lapse of heaven's eternal ages, we should reach a point where nothing more remains to be learned -- not another thing to be inquired after -- not another fact to be investigated, or truth to be known. Alas, what a blow to the bliss of heaven!

We are told that the angels are desiring to look into the things of salvation. Oh, yes; when they saw our Messiah born they were allowed to come so near us with their joyous outbursts of praise that even mortals could hear. Do you not suppose those angels too are growing in grace, and advancing in knowledge? No doubt they are, most wonderfully, and have been ever since they came into being.

How much more they must know of God now than they did before our world was created! And how much more they have yet to learn from God's government over our race. Think you they have no more desires after the knowledge of God? And have they no more desire to rise to yet higher conformity of heart and character to the great Model of Heaven?

If so with angels, surely not less so with their younger brethren -- the holy who are redeemed from among men.

You might suppose, that by studying in this school for a few days, you would learn all human science. This were a great mistake. You might master many sciences and still have other heights to ascend -- other vast fields of knowledge to explore. You might have the best of human teachers and the best possible opportunities for learning, yet still it would be enough to occupy you the length of many lives to master all there is in even human science. The mind is not made to be so filled to satiety that it craves no more -- can receive no more. Like the trees planted on the rivers of the waters of life, which bring forth twelve manner of fruits and whose roots go deep and drink largely of those blessed waters -- so is the mind which God has endowed with the functions of immortal progress.

As our ideal becomes elevated, and we see higher points to which we may arise, we shall have more enkindlings of desire, and more intense struggles to advance. What Christian does not find, as he reads the Bible over, new and deeper strata of meaning never seen before -- new truths revealed and new beauties displayed. Old father O. used to say, "I am reading the Word of God. It is deep and rich, like the great heart of its Author. I have read now two hours and have not got over but two verses. It will take me to all eternity to read it through." So it was. He really found more in the Bible than other men did. He went deeper, and the deeper he went, the richer did he find its precious ores of gold and silver.

So the Psalmist says, "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." Have you not been so ravished with love to this blessed book that you wanted to clasp it to your bosom and become purified with its spirit? As you go down into its depths and find in each successive stratum of its deep thoughts new beauties and new fields of truth to explore, have you not been filled with intense desire to live long enough and have time and strength enough to see, to learn, and to enjoy it all? Like the successive landscapes as you ascend the lofty mountain's side, at each stage you see them spreading out in grander beauty and broader range -- so, as you really study into the great and rich things of God's spiritual kingdom, there is no limit to this sweep of the knowledge of God; for the fields only become the broader and the more enchanting as you ascend. Do you not think that his soul must be truly blessed who eats and drinks and fills his soul with divine righteousness?

2. I am strongly impressed with the conviction that some of you need a new development of the spiritual life. You need to go deeper into the knowledge of God as revealed in the soul; you need to hunger and thirst more intensely, and be by this means filled as you have not often been as yet. Even though you may have tasted that the Lord is gracious, you yet need to eat and drink largely at His table. It will not avail you to live on those old dinners, long past and long since digested. You want a fresh meal. It is time for you to say, "I must know more about this being filled with righteousness. My soul languishes for this heavenly food. I must come again into this banqueting house to be feasted again with His love."

3. The full soul can not be satisfied to enjoy its rich spiritual provisions alone. If well fed himself, he will be only more exercised to see others also fed and blessed. The Spirit of Christ in his heart is a spirit of love, and this can never rest except as it sees others reaching the same standard of attainment and enjoyment which is so delightful to itself.

4. Real Christians should be, and in the main they will be, growing better and holier as they come nearer heaven. On the other hand, how great and fearful is the contrast between an aged growing Christian and an aged sinner growing in depravity and guilt! The one is ripening for heaven, the other for hell. The one goes on praising and loving, laboring and suffering for God and for his generation according to the will of God; but the other goes on his downward course, scolding and cursing as he goes, abhorred of men and disowned of his Maker. You have seen the awful contrast. You could hardly believe that two men so unlike were both raised in the same township, taught at the same school, instructed in the same religious assembly, and presented with the same Gospel; and yet see how manifestly the one is saved and the other damned. Each bears the sign beforehand -- the palpable, unmistakable evidence of the destiny that awaits him.

5. Is it not full time that each one of you who has any spiritual life should stand out before the world and put on your beautiful garments? Let all the world see that there is a power and a glory in the Gospel, such as human philosophy never has even approached. Show that the Gospel begets purity and peace. Show that it enlarges the heart and opens the hand for the good of all human kind. Show that it conquers selfishness and transforms the soul from hate to love.

Sinners, ye who have earthly hunger and thirst enough, let your ears be opened to hear the glad tidings of real salvation. Ye whose hearts have never known solid peace -- ye who are forever desiring, yet never satisfied -- ye who cry in your inmost souls; O for office! O for honor! O for wealth!

See, here is that which is better far than all you seek. Here are durable riches and righteousness. Here are the first installments of pleasures that flow forever at God's right hand. Here is heaven proffered and even pressed upon your regard and your choice. Choose life before death, as you would be wise for your eternal well-being.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finner/the-essential-elements-of-christian-experience/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net