

# The Wants of Man and Their Supply

by Charles Finney

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*The sermon explores the fundamental wants of man--physical, intellectual, and spiritual--and emphasizes that true fulfillment can only be found in a relationship with God.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 42:1, Psalm 63:1, Isaiah 55:1, Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 5:6, Matthew 7:7, Luke 15:14, John 4:14, Philippians 4:19, James 1:5

**Topics:** "Seeking God", "Spiritual Needs"

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## Description

Charles Finney's sermon 'The Wants of Man and Their Supply' emphasizes the inherent needs of humanity--physical, intellectual, and spiritual. He illustrates how, like the prodigal son, individuals often find themselves in a state of want, leading to a deep yearning for God and righteousness. Finney argues that true fulfillment can only be found in God, as He is the ultimate source that satisfies our moral and spiritual cravings. The sermon calls for self-examination and recognition of these needs, urging listeners to seek God earnestly to find true contentment and purpose. Ultimately, Finney stresses that neglecting these spiritual needs leads to profound wretchedness.

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## Transcript

"He began to be in want."--Luke 15:14.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."--Matthew 5:6.

The parable of the prodigal son is intended to illustrate the case of the sinner, coming to himself, opening his eyes to his true condition, and feeling himself destitute, empty, and wretched.

Man, as he stands revealed to himself in consciousness, is a wonderful being. By the earliest teachings of consciousness he finds himself to be a duality, consisting of body and soul. Farther revelations made in consciousness show him to be in some respects a tri-unity. For example, he has three classes of mental attributes: sensibility, intellect, and will. Still further, and yet more important in its bearings, he finds himself a tri-unity, inasmuch as he has three sides to his nature; one related to the material universe around him; another to all objects of thought and knowledge; and still another, related to God and to duty. He has first a body, and through this, peculiar relations to the world he lives in. He has appetites for food, and numerous wants that terminate on the physical universe. These wants crave their appropriate supplies, and cannot be satisfied with anything else. In the order of time, these are earliest developed. They are few in number, that is, they may be; and those which are real are so. This class alone cease at death. Yet

while they exist, they must be supplied.

Another fact deserving notice in reference to this class of wants is that man immediately assumes the existence of the objects to which his physical wants are correlated. The infant assumes this by instinct. There is no need that you should prove to man that these objects exist. He assumes this, and has only to inquire where they may be found. By a necessity of his nature he assumes their existence, and sets himself forthwith to search for them.

In the next place, let it be noticed that man has also an intellectual nature. He is made capable of knowledge, and has also an intense desire to know. These are real wants of his being. God has provided for their supply in the illimitable ocean of truth which invests him on every side. God has also breathed into his soul a spirit of enquiry, and acting out its deep impulses, he must inquire into the truth and reason of things. It is curious to notice the difference between children and other animals. If you had never seen an infant before, and were to study his developments for the first time, you would be forcibly struck with these remarkable traits. The little one begins to notice and to look inquiringly almost as soon as it begins to look at all. See him fix his eyes upon his little hands, as if he would ask, What are these? He looks into his mother's eye as if he would ask a thousand questions, long before he can utter a word. But you can find no such manifestations of thought and enquiry in the kitten and the lamb. Give them enough to eat and scope for rest and play, and they are satisfied. They will never seem to ask you the reasons of things. Nay more, you cannot awaken within them a spirit of enquiry by any appliances you can employ. It is not in them, and you cannot get it in.

But the infant is a philosopher by birth. He has intellectual wants lying in his very nature, and he cannot be satisfied without their supply. He must know the reasons of things. This is the true idea of philosophy. The lower animals will lie down perfectly satisfied without knowing the reasons of things, or anything more about things than just suffices to meet their animal wants. But man, even from infancy, has wants pressing upon him in this direction, and he rouses himself like a lion from his lair, to grasp the good his inner being craves in this direction. He cannot be satisfied without. He finds himself related to the whole universe of matter, and O! what a world is opened to him for enquiry and knowledge! How naturally he looks up and abroad! It is not easy for the horse or the ox to look up. Their eye is prone; but man's is outward and upward. Man is made for enquiry.

It is this spirit of enquiry which leads so many young people to this place. They come here to get knowledge. How they hang on our lips, and press on us for the reasons of things, as if they could not be satisfied till they have penetrated to the bottom of every subject.

Men assume that there is an explanation of everything. They assume that these innate demands for knowledge were created, not to be denied--not to remain ungratified, but to be gratified. Hence they grasp after knowledge, searching for it as for silver, and as if they deemed it more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold. What young man or young woman has not felt such curiosity excited, as to extort the cry--I must know: I must find out the facts on this subject, and the reasons of the facts besides!

Thirdly, man has yet another side to his nature--the moral and spiritual department, correlated to God, to his attributes and law, and to great questions of duty and destiny. Man learns from consciousness that he has such a side to his being--such a department in his nature. Hence he inquires after God. He raises questions about right and wrong, and asks to know the nature of virtue and vice. Often he finds in himself a great uneasiness of which he cannot well define the cause. It puts him upon pressing these enquiries

into his responsibilities and his mission in this state of his existence.

Let it now be especially observed that man instinctively assumes the existence of those things which stand related to each of these three sides of his nature. The infant begins to feel after his food with no thought of question as to the fact of there being food provided for his wants. When intelligence opens, the same assumption is made, that there are verities to be known, and the reasons why these things are so rather than otherwise. In like manner, when the eyes of the moral man begin to open, he assumes his own immortality, and assumes also the existence of a God. This is, indeed, the true account of his knowledge of this truth. Some have supposed that the idea of God in the human mind is wholly a thing of education. It is so in the same sense in which much of our intellectual knowledge is. There are many things about God which we need to learn from his word and from his works. But no man needs to have it demonstrated to him that there is a God, any more than a child needs to have it proved that there is food provided for him in the physical world, or the adult, that there are things to be known. The great cardinal truths pertaining to the existence of God, accountability, and duty, are assumed as readily and surely as men assume that there are truths correlated to their intelligence, or supplies in nature for their animal wants. It is of no use to say that some men are atheists and therefore this doctrine cannot be true. Some men have, by speculation, befooled themselves into the belief (so they say) that there is no physical universe. But they believe in its existence none the less, and crave the good it proffers, and cannot live without it. Each one of these philosophers, although he may deny the existence of any physical universe, and declare there is no such thing as matter, yet expects his dinner at the appointed hour, and needs it for his comfort full as much as if he had not denied the existence of any such thing. So these atheists inly [sic.] know there is a God, although they say, "in their heart," there is none.

It is vastly difficult for any man to feel at ease while he is resisting the constitutional demands of any department of his nature. "Alas!" said a young and ambitious lawyer, who was driving his business and his books and his briefs,--"alas!" said he, "what is the matter with me! I try to study, and cannot. I try to be happy, but I am not. What do I want? Wherein is the lack that, with all I have, yet leaves me so wretched?"

It was this strain of enquiry which led him to see that he needed God for his portion, and could not find a paradise without Him.

Men need not wait for the proof of their immortality, or for proof of the necessity of virtue as a means for happiness. They know these things by a spontaneity of their moral nature. They know that holiness is a great want of their moral nature. How plainly do they see and know that they need such a being as God, to love and to obey, to trust and to adore!

I appeal to these students. If you have cultivated the habit of self-study, you have learned that you cannot find out yourself without finding God. Tracing out the problems of your own existence reveals to you your Maker. An irresistible conviction will force itself upon you that there is a God, and that you have everything to hope from his favor, and everything to fear from his frown. A view of yourself and of your own spiritual wants will show you that nothing else can supply your need but God. Have you not already found that the more you study, and the more you cultivate the habit of reflection, the less you can make yourself happy without God? Most of you find it impossible to enjoy yourselves in sin as you were wont to do before you gave yourselves to thought and reflection. The higher you ascend in the grade of moral and intellectual culture, the more intensely will you feel the want of moral culture and moral enjoyments. It is impossible for you to rise as a man without feeling a growing demand for the presence and influence of God, as your Father and Friend.

Commonly, as the human mind opens to surrounding objects, and as its powers successively develop themselves, attention is first turned to physical wants, and next to intellectual. In one or the other of these pursuits, or in both, man is wont to become so engrossed as mainly to overlook the moral side of his nature. Yet the wants of his moral being will develop themselves, often in such a way at first as to make him exceedingly wretched, while yet he does not see what ails him, and quite fails to comprehend the reason of his unhappiness. No amount of knowledge or purely mental culture can make him happy. On the contrary, the more he knows the more he wants, and the more intensely dissatisfied he becomes with himself.

The objects that supply his bodily wants are at hand. He meets them on every side, and in abundance. So also, pushing his efforts for this end, he finds ample materials for supplying his intellectual wants. He finds enough for mind to feed upon--enough to exercise his faculties, and interest him in studious thought and earnest research.

So also with his moral and spiritual wants. These have their correlated objects. God is all around him. In the kingdoms of nature he sees the handiwork of an intelligent, designing Maker; and in the ways of providence, he cannot help seeing the agency of a kind and beneficent Father. As his natural eye gives him the material world, so his spiritual eye would give him God in everything--were it not for the blinding influence of a bad heart. This fearfully darkens his vision to those great spiritual truths he so much needs to know. While he might be advancing hour by hour in the knowledge of God and of spiritual truth, going down into the great depths of sympathy with God, he finds instead a fearful conflict between his depraved impulses and his conscience, under the influence of which, truth gains but a slow access to his soul. Moreover, the moral side of his nature being latest developed, he often becomes so engrossed with sensual or intellectual pursuits, that he scarce has any power left for effective thought upon moral subjects. How fearfully some give way to worldly interests and claims, and others also to intellectual pursuits, some of you must know but too well.

Yet those moral wants you have neglected will some day arise and make their demands heard. It is well if they assume this urgency while yet their supply is possible. The prodigal son was a case of one who felt the pressure of these wants. He said--"I must go home to my father." David entered on record his testimony--"My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is." "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" The mind thus becomes deeply conscious of cravings and aspirations which have God for their object, and which nothing but God can supply. If you examine the nature of these wants, you find them in part social. The mind craves communion with other minds. It thirsts for society, and wisely concludes that no society, no fellowship with other minds, can in any wise compare with communion with God. Perhaps he has tried the fellowship of mortals, and found it still unsatisfying. Hence he craves the richer, far richer, fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. He longs to rise above communion with the finite to hold communion with the Infinite. Weary of drawing instructions from erring man, he thirsts for the pure fountains of knowledge as they flow from the Infinite Intelligence. Conscious that he must himself exist forever, he craves the acquaintance and sympathy of his eternal Maker and Father. As he comes to know something of his great and glorious Friend, he feels that he needs an eternity in which to study God in his multiform and wonderful works and ways. And when he comes to breathe the atmosphere of purity which invests the glorious Presence, how intensely does he long for deliverance from all moral corruption! O, how does his soul thirst for an ever-growing conformity to God! The language of holy men on the sacred page is

exceedingly strong on these points, as we may see from David's Psalms and Paul's Epistles. The latter declares, "Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in Him." No one can read these strong utterances of feeling, desire, and purpose, without seeing that the mind may develop itself with amazing intensity in this direction. There is scope and occasion for its utmost energies and aspirations.

## REMARKS

1. He must be wretched who neglects to supply his physical wants. He must pay the stern penalty of his neglect, as he will soon learn to his sorrow. Each organ of the body needs its appropriate development, exercise, and nutriment. He who should disregard the laws of his constitution in respect to the proper supply of these constitutional demands will find ere long that the penalty of such neglect is fearful and sure.

In like manner, if he stultifies himself and takes no pains to inquire after truth and knowledge; if he never troubles himself to know, and denies to his intellectual nature all its just demands, he must be far more wretched than a brute can be. But let a man neglect all spiritual culture and training, he becomes far more wretched still. Physical demands cease with the death of the body; the spiritual must continue during his entire existence, stretching on and still on forever, and probably forever increasing.

2. How cruel for a man to consider himself as merely a brute. Giving himself up to a grovelling life, regardless of his spiritual nature and even of his intellectual nature also, what a wretch he must be! Ye, who are students, know how to pity, and how to despise him! --Ye can understand what he loses, for you know what satisfaction is taken in finding out the reasons of things. But see the mere animal who never looks abroad, never raises an enquiry. Why does he not set himself to study and think? Why not cast his thoughts abroad for knowledge? Why does he live a fool and a dunce, when he might be a man?

3. How cruel to treat anybody else as a mere animal! This is the most cruel thing you can do towards a fellow-being. You deny the existence of those great qualities which constitute him a man. You feed him as you would a horse, withholding all aliment for his intelligent mind. You feed him and your horse, each for the same reason;--you want to keep him in working order to serve your selfish purposes. You regard all knowledge beyond what your horse needs as only so much injury to him. Holding your slave as his master, do you send him to school? Never. Do you teach him to read? Never. Do you provide him any means of instruction? No. In the same manner you shut down the gate upon his moral nature. You close up the windows of his soul and keep it as utterly dark as possible to the light of heaven. You tighten the thumb-screws down on every inlet of knowledge, so that he shall never know that he is anything more or other than a beast! Is not this horrible? What then shall we say of the man who does just this upon himself!

4. The more a man develops his intellectual faculties, yet neglects moral culture, the more miserable he becomes. It is striking to see how wretched the most highly cultivated men become. During all the latter years of his life, Daniel Webster was never seen sober, but he was wretched. While in his senses, his mind was deep in sorrow. Look in upon Congress and see there the great men of our land and of other lands; not a man of them is happy without piety and sound moral culture. Go and ask Byron if his gigantic mind and almost superhuman genius, made him an angel of bliss. Ask him if he found this world a paradise. Perhaps no man ever cursed his fellow-beings more intensely, or enjoyed less in their society than he. All such men, with high intellectual culture, make themselves wretched because they leave their

moral powers in a state of utter wreck and distortion. There is no escape from this result. High intellectual culture must inevitably develop the idea and the claims of God. Let them turn their enquiries which way they will, they find God, and must feel more or less convicted of obligation to love and obey them [sic.]. Repelling these obligations, it is impossible that they can be otherwise than wretched. I alluded to the case of a young lawyer who asked--"What makes me so unhappy? I feel myself thoroughly wretched, and surely I can see no reason for it." The secret was this. All his life long he had neglected God. His studies had more and more brought God to view, and his sensibilities under the action of conscience, had become exceedingly acute. How could he be otherwise than wretched? --He might not see the reason of his unhappy state; yet if he had well considered the laws of his moral nature, he would have found the reason lying there. Many of you begin to find the same results in your experience, and you must realize them more and more if you remain alienated in heart from God while yet your intelligence is more and more revealing God and his rightful claims on your heart.

5. Neglecters of God are not well aware either of the cause or the degree of their wretchedness. The wants of their physical nature are all met. They are fed and clad, and have every comfort that their physical system craves. Their social wants too are met. They have friends and society. They have also cultivated taste and any desired amount of objects for its gratification. There is a library and books in plenty. There are works of art from the masters in every profession. What more could they need? Yet they are wretched. What is the matter? How many thousand times has this enquiry been made--What can be the matter with me? I have everything heart can wish, or the eye desire; books, teachers, unbounded sources of information, yet I am unhappy; what does ail me?

I can tell you what. There is another side of your nature, more important than all the rest, and more craving, yet you shut off all its demands, and deny its claims. You have a conscience, yet you resist its monitions. You have desires, correlated to God, yet you deny them their appropriate gratification. No fact is more ennobling to human nature than this, that man has desires correlated to God even as he has to his fellow men, so that he can no more be happy without God than he can be without the sympathy and society of man. We all understand this law of human nature. We see man thirsting for companionship with his fellow man, longing for society, and we cannot fail to see and to say that man is so constructed in his very nature that he must have society. Deprive him of it and he is wretched. Now the striking fact is that man has an equally strong demand in his very constitution for sympathy and fellowship with God. Unless this too be supplied, he cannot be happy.

Suppose you were to meet a man as ignorant of his physical wants as most men are of their spiritual. He does not understand that he must have food for his stomach; clothes for his body; heat to warm him in the winter frosts. Ah! you would see the reason of his misery. Strange he does not know enough to supply his wants!

Or suppose him equally ignorant of his intellectual wants. He starves his soul of knowledge. Lean and barren, he seems to be panting for something higher and better, yet unaware both of the nature of this craving and of the proper source of supply. How easily could you tell him that "for the soul to be without knowledge is not good."

So there is also a moral side to man's nature, and he can never be supremely happy till he becomes morally perfect. He struggles to get out of his moral agony; feels as if he should die if he cannot get out from under this moral load. Who has not felt this loathing of his abominable self, because he did not and would not search after God! Never did any man long for food or water more intensely than the man, who

suffers himself to attend to the inner voice of his moral being, thirsts after God.

6. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst, for when they cry unto God to be filled, He will fill them. Let them cry unto God for bread and water; does He not hear their cry? Ah, verily,--He hears the young ravens when they cry, and the young lions when they roar and suffer hunger; and the infant voices of his intelligent creation are not less sure to come up into his ear. Does He not love to supply these wants which grow out of the nature He gave them? Indeed He does. He spread out the fair earth and its rich fields of lovely green. He meant to fill the earth with supplies for man and beast, yea, for every living thing.

In like manner, of the mental wants of his intelligent creatures. He loves to meet these with open hand;--loves to excite the spirit of enquiry and then supply to us the means of gratification. The things we need to know He loves to teach us.

But our moral and spiritual wants, he is infinitely more ready to supply. Does not your inner heart say,--verily, this must be so? It is so. No sooner does the soul go forth after God, than He is near--ineffably near. It is wonderful to see how soon God is found when once the soul begins in true earnest to inquire after Him. Is it not striking that God should so love to reveal himself and should take such pains to insinuate himself into our confidence, and, as it were, work himself into universal communion and contact with our whole souls, so as to fill every moral want of our being? In view of this desire and effort on his part, and in view also of the means provided and promised for this result, we can see why God should command us to "be filled with the Spirit." Such infinite supplies provided and such earnest desire manifested on the part of God to have us appropriate these supplies to their utmost extent;--it is as if an ocean of water were suspended above our heads, and we have only to lift the valve and let down these ocean waters upon our needy souls. There is the promise, let down like a silken cord; what have we to do but to take hold of it and pull down infinite blessings!

7. Until man feels his spiritual wants, he will resist all attempts you may make to bring him to God. Hence the necessity of touching the mainspring of danger,--of arousing his fears, and developing his moral sensibility. Hence the need of appeals to his conscience and to his sense of danger. Until you can make his moral nature sensitive and rouse up his dark and dead soul to moral feelings, there is no hope for him. But when you can touch this side of his nature and quicken him to feeling and even to agony under the lash of conscience, and make him really appreciate his wants, then he begins to feel his wants, and to ask how they can be met and supplied. This is the true secret of promoting revivals. You must go around among these dark, insensible minds and pour in light upon this side of their nature. You must wake them up to earnest thought--you must rouse up the man's conscience and soul till he shall cry out after God and his salvation.

I always have strong hopes of students; for although they sometimes get wise in their own conceits, and sometimes render themselves ridiculous by their low ambition, yet, taken as a class, there is great hope of them. If suitable means are used, very many of them will be converted. Probably no class of students ever passed through college, the right means of instruction and influence being used with them, without deeply feeling the power of truth, and many of them becoming converted. They must, almost of necessity, feel every blow that is struck; every truth, brought home clearly through their intelligence upon their conscience wakens a response; and impels the soul to cry out after God. Hence I have strong hopes of you. Yet many of you, I know, are not now converted. God grant you may be soon! I hope the hearts of this Christian people will reach your case in strong effectual prayer. You can indeed resist every effort made to save you--if you will; you can reject Christ, however earnest his entreaties or tender his loving kindness; but you

cannot change your nature so that it shall be happy in rebellion against God and his truth; you cannot hush the rebukes of an abused conscience forever; these wants of your inner being must be met, or what will become of you? Your bodily wants will soon cease; and you need not care much therefore for them. Your intellectual pleasures also must ere long come to an end; for how can they pass over with you into the realm of outer darkness where are weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth? Doubtless that is a state not of light and truth and joy in pursuit of knowledge; but of delusions and errors and of knowledge agonizing its possessor with keenest pangs forever and ever! I do not believe sinners will have any intellectual pleasure in hell. It cannot be possible that they will enjoy any knowledge they will have there, or any means of attaining knowledge. The very idea is precluded by the relations that conscience must sustain to everything they know. All possible knowledge must have some bearing upon God, duty, and their moral relations, and hence must serve only to harrow up their sensibilities with keenest anguish. O how will they gnash their teeth and gnaw their tongues in direst woe forever! "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked!" More and more deeply dissatisfied to all eternity! Execrating and cursing their insane selves for the madness of rejecting God and his gospel when they might have had both. Now it only remains for them to wail in bitterness and anguish, lifting up their unavailing cries, to which the thunders of Jehovah's curse respond in everlasting echoes--"Woe to the wicked; it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

O sinner, will you yet press on into the very jaws of such a hell!

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