HOLY LONGINGS

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A SERMON
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"My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times."
Psalm 119:20

ONE of the best tests of a man's character will be found in his deepest and heartiest longings. You cannot always judge a man by what he is doing at any one time, for he may be under constraints which compel him to act contrary to his true self, or he may be under a transient impulse from which he will soon be free.

He may for a while back from that which is evil, and yet he may be radically bad. Or he may be constrained by force of temptation to that which is wrong, yet his real self may rejoice in righteousness. A man may not certainly be pronounced to be good because for the moment he is doing good, nor may he be condemned as evil because under certain constraints he may be committing sin. A man's longings are more inward, and more near to his real self than his outward acts—they are more natural, in that they are entirely free, and beyond compulsion or restraint.

As a man longs in his heart, so is he. I mean not every idle wish, as I now speak, but strong desires of the heart—these are the true life-blood of a man's nature. You shall know whether you yourself be good or evil by answering this question. To which have you the greatest desire? Do you continually long after selfish pleasures? Then you are evil, beyond all question. Do you sigh to be, and feel, and do that which is good—is this the great aim of your life? Then in the core of your being there is some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel.

So then, dear hearers, your heart-longings may furnish you with excellent helps for self-examination, and I beg you to apply them at once. The things of the heart touch the root of the matter. Unbelievers are "a people that do err in their heart," and men truly find the Lord when they "seek him with their whole heart"—so that the heart is all-important, and its longings are among the surest marks of its condition.

Moreover, heart-longings are prophecies of what a man will be. It is not always capacity, if we could ascertain it, which will certify us as to what a man will do, for many men of large abilities achieve next to nothing for want of inclination. Their talents lie hidden in the earth, and albeit they might have succeeded marvelously well in certain pursuits, they do nothing at all remarkable because they have no tendencies in that direction.

An individual may have the means to relieve the poor, and yet never perform a charitable act from want of liberality. Or he may have great mental powers, and yet never produce a line of useful literature, because he is eaten up with idleness.

But other things being equal, the longings of a man are a pretty sure index of what he will be—they cannot create capacity, but they develop it—they lead to the use of means for its increase, and they make the mind keen to seize on opportunities. By some means or other, a man usually becomes what he intensely longs to be, especially if those desires are formed in early youth while yet the world is all before him where to choose. Hence our proverb, "The child is father to the man."

Even in little children tastes and pursuits have been prophetic—the young artist sketches his sister in the cradle, the youthful engineer is busy with his boyish inventions. If his longings deepen, strengthen, and become vehement with the increase of his years, the young man's character is being surely molded from within, and this is often a greater force than that of circumstances acting from without.

Thus is it in spiritual things—we may form forecasts as to what we shall be from our burning and pressing desires. Desires are the buds out of which words and deeds will ultimately be developed. Spiritual desires are the shadows of coming blessings. What God intends to give us, He first sets us longing for. Hence the wonderful efficacy of prayer, because prayer is the embodiment of a longing inspired of God, because He intends to bestow the blessing.

What are your longings, then, my hearer? Do you long to be holy? The Lord will make you holy. Do you long to conquer sin? You shall overcome it by faith in Jesus.. Are you pining after fellowship with Christ? He will come and make His abode with you. Does your soul thirst, yea, even pant after God as the hart for the water brooks? Then you shall be filled with all His fullness. For all these longings are prophetic of that which is to be, even as the snowdrop and crocus and anemone foretell the approach of spring.

I say not that it is so with all human wishes, for, "The sluggard desireth and hath nothing" and many a man has such evil cravings within his heart that it were contrary to the purity of God for Him to grant them. But where there are intense, heart-breaking yearnings of a holy order, depend upon it, they are tokens of good things to come.

Where the grace of God reigns in the soul, it makes a man become a stranger among his fellows, and it breeds in him peculiar affections and novel desires. The verse which precedes my text runs thus, "I am a stranger in the earth"—he was a king surrounded by courtiers and friends, and yet he was not at home, but like one banished from his native land. And being thus a stranger in the earth, he had a remarkable desire which worldlings could not understand, and that singular craving he here expresses, "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times."

Worldly men care nothing for the judgments of God. No, they care nothing for God Himself. But when a man becomes new born, a citizen of heaven, there grows up within his spirit a spiritual appetite of which he had felt nothing before, and he longs after God and His holy Word.

See to it, men and brethren, whether your souls cry out for God, for the living God, for again I say, by your longings you may test yourselves—by your heart's desires you may forecast your future—and by your hungerings and thirstings you may judge whether you are men of this world or citizens of the world to come. With such aids to self-judgment, no man ought to remain in doubt as to his spiritual condition and eternal prospects.

In order that we may be helped to the right use of this text, we shall handle it thus—first, we shall notice *the saint's absorbing object*, "Thy judgments." Secondly, we shall reflect upon *the saint's ardent longing*, "my soul breaketh for the longing that it hath." And thirdly, we shall mention *the saint's cheering reflections,* which he may readily draw from the fact that he does experience such inward heart-break. Of these we will speak as the divine Spirit shall enable us, for without Him we know nothing.

I. First, then, let us think OF THE SAINTS' ABSORBING OBJECT.

They long after God's judgments. The word "judgments" is here used as synonymous with the "word of God." It does not mean those judgments of God with which He smites sinners and executes the sentence of His law, but it refers to the revealed will or declared judgments of God.

All through this long Psalm the writer is speaking of the Word of God, the law of God, the testimonies, the precepts, the statutes of God—and here the word "judgments" is used in the same sense. Perhaps I shall give you the meaning pretty readily if I remind you that the commandments and doctrines of the Word are God's judgments about moral and spiritual things—His decisions as to what is right and what is wrong—and His solutions of the great problems of the universe.

God's revealed plan of salvation is God's decision upon man's destiny—God's judgment of condemnation against human sin, and yet His judgment of justification on behalf of believing sinners, whom He regards as righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible may be rightly regarded as the book of divine judgments, the recorded sentences of the High Court of heaven, the infallible decision of perfect holiness upon questions which concern our souls.

"This is the Judge that ends the strife
Where wit and reason fail;
Our guide through devious paths of life,
Our shield when doubts assail."

You may come to the Scriptures as men came to the throne of Solomon, where hard cases were at once met. Yet a greater than Solomon is here. Search God's Word, and you will have before your eyes the ultimate judgment of unerring truth, the last decree from the supreme authority, from which there is no appeal. The Bible contains the verdicts of the Judge of all the earth, the judgments of God, who cannot lie and cannot err.

Thus God's Word is rightly called His "judgments." It is a book not to be judged by us, but to be our judge—not a word of it may be altered or questioned—but to it we may constantly refer as to a court of appeal whose sentence is decisive.

David in our text tells us how he desired the Lord's judgments, or His Word, by which we understand, first, that *he greatly reverenced the Word*. He was not among those who regard the Bible as only a very important portion of human literature, but as being no more inspired than the works of Shakespeare or Bacon.

Little as David had of the Scriptures, he had a solemn reverence for what he had, and stood in awe of it. I have no objection to honest criticism of the keenest kind, but I am shocked at certain divines who cut and carve the blessed Word as if it were some vile carcass given over to their butchery.

When learned men handle the words of this book, let them not forget whose book it is, and whose words they are that they are examining. There is a near approach to blasphemy against God Himself in irreverence to His Word. There is no book like this for authority and majesty—it is hedged about with solemn sanctions, so that it has both a wall of fire round about it, and a glory in its midst to make it distinct from all other writings.

All other books might be heaped together in one pile and burned—as the Mahometans burned the Alexandrian Library—with less loss to the world than would be occasioned by the total obliteration of a single page of the sacred volume.

All other books are at the best but as gold leaf, whereof it takes acres to make an ounce of the precious metal. But this book is solid gold. It contains ingots, masses, mines, yea, whole worlds of priceless treasure, nor could its contents be exchanged for pearls, rubies, or the "terrible crystal" itself.

Even in the mental wealth of the wisest men there are no jewels like the truths of revelation. Oh, sirs, the thoughts of men are vanity, the conceptions of men are low and groveling at their best. And He who has given us this book has said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

Let it be to you and to me a settled matter that the Word of the Lord shall be honored in our minds and enshrined in our hearts. Let others speak as they may, "Our soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto the Lord's judgments." We could sooner part with all that is sublime and beautiful, cheering or profitable, in human literature than lose a single syllable from the mouth of God.

But more—inasmuch as the psalmist greatly reverenced God's Word, *he intensely desired to know its contents*. He had not much of it, probably only the five books of Moses, but the Pentateuch was enough to fill his whole soul with delight.

Never depreciate, I pray you, the Old Testament. Remember that the great things that are said in the Psalms about the Word of God were not spoken concerning the New Testament, which was not then written—although they may most fitly be applied by us to the entire series of inspired books, yet they were originally spoken only concerning the first five of them, so that the first part of the Bible, according to the Holy Spirit's own testimony, is to be valued beyond all price.

Indeed, the substance of the New Testament is in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—there shut up like Noah in the ark, or hidden like Moses in his mother's house. The

lovely form of queenly truth is there, only her veil conceals her countenance. The clearer shining of the New Testament is not a different light, nor perhaps is it in itself brighter, but it shines through a thinner medium, and therefore more fully enlightens us.

If I might venture to compare one part of God's Word with another, I have even thought that the first books are the deepest, and that if we had but skill to find it out, we should discover within them a more condensed mass of revelation than even in the New Testament. I will not defend the opinion, but usually the lower strata, though most hidden, are the most dense, and certainly that which is most easy to be understood is not therefore of necessity the fullest of meaning, but the reverse.

The various books of Scripture do not increase in real value, they only advance in their adaptation to us. The light is the same, but the lantern is clearer, and we see more. The treasure of the Gospel is contained in the mines of the books of Moses, and I do not wonder therefore that David, instinctively knowing it to be there, but not being able to reach it, felt a great longing after it.

He was not so well able to get at the truth as we are, since he had not the life of Christ to explain the types, nor apostolic explanations to open up the symbols of the law. Therefore he sighed inwardly, and felt a killing heartbreak of desire to reach that which he knew was laid up in store for him. He saw the casket, but could not find the key.

If he had not been sure that the treasure was there, he would not have cried, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." But he was like a voyager on the verge of a discovery, who nevertheless cannot quite reach it. He was like Columbus out at sea with the fruits of an unknown continent floating beneath his keel, but the wind did not favor his reaching the shore.

He was like a miner whose pick has struck upon a lump of metal, and he is sure that gold is there, but he cannot get it away from the quartz in which it is embedded. The more certain he is that it is there, and the harder it is to reach, the more insatiable does his desire become to possess himself of the treasure. Hence I see the reasonableness of the psalmist's vehement passion and I marvel not that he cried, "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times."

But I am sure that David did not merely want to know as a matter of intellectual pleasure, but *he wished to feed upon God's Word*, and what a very different thing that is, that feeding upon the Word, from the bare knowledge of it. You can teach a child many chapters out of the Bible, and yet it may not have fed on a word of it.

I have known persons to be so foolish as to set it as a task to a child to learn a portion of Scripture. I call this foolish, and surely it is also wicked to make the Word of God into a punishment—as well turn the temple into a prison. Undoubtedly many know the history, the doctrine, and the letter of God's Word as well as others know their Homer or their Virgil, and so far, so good. But oh, to feed upon the Word of God is quite another thing.

An oven full of bread is well enough, but for nourishment, a loaf on the table is better, and a morsel in the mouth is better still. And if the mouthfuls are well-digested and taken up into the system, they are then best of all.

In like manner, truth in a sermon is to be valued. Truth attentively heard comes nearer to practical benefit. Truth *believed* is better still, and truth absorbed into the spiritual system is best of all. Alas, I fear we are not so absorbent as we ought to be. I like to see men who can be spiritual sponges to God's truth—suck it right up, and take it into themselves. It would be well, however, that they should not be so far like sponges as to part with the truth when the hands of the world attempt to wring it out of them.

I say, we are not receptive enough, brethren, and that because our hearts are not in tune with God. Do we not feel at times that certain doctrines of the Word are hardly to our mind? We do not quite agree with the divine judgments on this or that—we dare not question their rightness, but we rather wish they were different.

Friends, this must not be so any longer. All that kind of feeling must be gone. We must agree with God in all that He has spoken, and let our belief run side by side with the teaching of the Lord. It is high

time that we were altogether agreed with God. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"

We shall sit at the last great day as assessors with Christ in the great assize to judge the fallen spirits. Does it not become us to be of the same mind with our Lord? Should we not delight in His judgments even now that we may the more heartily say "Amen" to His verdict from the great white throne?

Our judgment must be daily more and more conformed to the judgments of God, which are laid down in Scripture, and there must, at any rate, be in our spirit a longing after holiness until we delight in the law of the Lord, and meditate therein both day and night.

We shall grow to the likeness of that which we feed upon—heavenly food will make us heavenly-minded. The Word received into the heart changes us into its own nature, and by rejoicing in the decisions of the Lord, we learn to judge after His judgment, and to delight ourselves in that which pleases Him. This sense, I think, comes nearer to the explanation of David's intense longing.

Doubtless, David *longed to obey God's Word*—he wished in everything to do the will of God without fault either of omission or of commission. He prays in another place, "Teach me thy law perfectly." Do you, my hearer, long after perfection in that same fashion? For all that truly know God must have a mighty yearning to run in the way of the Lord's commandments.

He does not live before God who does not crave to live like God. There is no regeneration where there are no aspirations after holiness. The actual practice of obedience is necessary as a proof of the possession of true grace, for the rule is invariable, "By their fruits ye shall know them." No man knows the Word of God till he obeys it, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine."

The psalmist also *longed to feel the power of God's judgments in his own heart.* You know something about this, my friend, if the Spirit of God has had dealings with you. Have you not felt the Lord judging you in the chamber of your conscience? The Spirit comes by the Word, and sets our iniquities before us, our secret sins in the light of His countenance.

You had forgotten the wrong, or at least, you hardly remembered it as a sin—but suddenly you saw it all. As I have looked upon a landscape under a cloudy sky, a gleam of sunlight has suddenly fallen upon one portion of it, and made it stand out brilliantly from the midst of the surrounding gloom—so has the Holy Spirit poured a clear light upon some one act or set of acts of my life, and I have seen it as I never saw it before.

That inner light has judged us, and led us to seek fresh cleansing—the judgments of God have come into our souls, and led us anew to cry for mercy. I have found it so, have not you? The sins of our youth, and our former transgressions, have been judged of the Lord within us.

I do not think that David fully recognized all the sins of his youth till he had become an old man, and alas, many who have sinned in ways in which he never erred have failed to know the evil of their transgressions till in their bones and in their flesh they have felt its terrible effects years afterwards.

The Lord will judge His people and make sin bitter to them. Ought we to wish for this? I say, *Yes*. Every true man should feel a longing in his soul to have every sin within him exposed, condemned, and executed. He should wish to hide nothing, but to be revealed unto himself and humbled by the sight.

There are two judgments, one of which we must undergo—either judgment in the forum of the conscience, or else judgment before the great white throne at last. You must either condemn yourself or be condemned. A court of arraigns must be held in your heart, and you must be tried, and cast, and condemned in your own soul, or else you will not fully know the judgments of the Lord, or truly seek pardon at His hands. God justifies the men who condemn themselves, and none but these shall ever obtain the righteousness which is of God by faith.

Hence we may long for stripping judgments that we may obtain the robe of righteousness. We may cry to be emptied that grace may fill us. David desires that God's Word would come right into him, and hold its court and judge and try him. And he came to feel this process to be so necessary and so salutary that his soul broke with the longing which he had to be dealt with by God after this fashion.

This is wisdom and prudence when a man so desires sanctification that he is straitened till painful processes are being carried on by which his purity is to be produced. It is a wise child that will, for the sake of health, even long to take the appointed medicine. God's children are not far from being well when they have reached such a point of sacred judgment.

This is the wish of all true believers—*to be perfectly conformed to the judgments of God*. Some of us can honestly say that we would not have a second wish for ourselves if our heavenly Father would grant us this one—that we might be perfect even as He is. We would leave all other matters with Him as to wealth or poverty, health or sickness, honor or shame, life or death, if He would but give us complete conformity to His will. This is the object of the craving, yearning, and sighing of our souls. We hunger to be holy.

Here I must correct myself as to our one desire, for surely, if the Lord would make us holy we should then desire that all other men would be the same. Oh that the world were converted to God! Oh that the truth of God would go forth like the brightness of the morning! Would God that every error and superstition might be chased away like bats and owls before the rising of the sun!

O God, Your servants long for this. We ask for nothing except these two things—first reign, O Lord, in the triple kingdom of our nature—and then reign over all nature. Let the whole earth be filled with Your glory and our prayers are ended.

I hope that in this sense our soul breaketh for the longing which it has towards God's judgments.

II. And now, secondly, let us think of THE SAINT'S ARDENT LONGINGS.

First, let me say of these longings that *they constitute a living experience*, for dead things have no aspirations or cravings. You shall visit the graveyard, and exhume all the bodies you please, but you shall find neither desire nor craving. Longing lingers not within a lifeless corpse. Where the heart is breaking with desire, there is life.

This may comfort some of you—you have not attained as yet to the holiness you admire, but you long for it—ah, then, you are a living soul, the life of God is in you. You have not yet come to be conformed to the precept, but oh how you wish you were—that wish proves that a spark of the divine life is in your soul.

The stronger that longing becomes, the stronger is the life from which it springs—a feeble life has feeble desires, but a vigorous life has vehement desires, burning like coals of juniper. Are you earnestly longing this morning? Can you say that your heart pines for God as the watcher through the midnight sighs for the dawn, or as the traveler over burning sand longs for the shadow of a great rock? Oh, then, though I would not have you rest in longings—and indeed, I know you never can—yet they are a proof that you are spiritually alive.

Heart-longings are far better tests than attendance at sacraments, for men who are dead in sin have dared to come both to baptism and communion. Eager desires prove spiritual life much better than supposed attainments, for these supposed attainments may all be imaginary, but a heart breaking for the longing which it has to God's Word is no fancy, it is a fact too painful to be denied.

Next, recollect the expression used in our text *represents a humble sense of imperfection*. David had not yet come to be completely conformed to God's judgments, nor yet to know them perfectly, or else he would not have said that he longed for them. So it is with us.

We have not reached perfection, but do not let us, therefore, be discouraged, for the apostle of the Gentiles said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." And the man after God's own heart, even David, when he was at his best, and I think he was so when he was writing this blessed Psalm, says not so much that he had obtained anything as that he longed after it, not so much that he had yet grasped it, but sighed for it, "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath."

I do not envy those who have no more longings, who have reached so divine a height that henceforth they can climb no higher. I heard of one who said his will was so perfectly resigned to the will of God that in fact he had no will, and so he had given up prayer, having nothing to seek.

This is fine talk. When a man gets so full of life that he no longer breathes, I should say that he is dead. Prayer is the breath of the soul, and he that can do without it is dead in sin. When a man thinks himself so good that he cannot be better, he is probably so bad that he could not be worse.

That is the judgment which caution will pronounce upon him, for all good men long to be better, and better men desire to be best of all that they may dwell in heaven. The more grace the saints have, the more they desire—sacred greed is begotten by the possession of the love of God, "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments."

Furthermore, the expression of the text *indicates an advanced experience*. Augustine dwells upon this idea, for he rightly says, at first there is an aversion in the heart to God's Word, and desire after it is a matter of growth. After aversion is removed, there often comes an indifference in the heart—it is no longer opposed to godliness, but it does not care to possess it.

Then, through divine grace, there springs up in the soul a sense of the beauty of God's Word and will, and an admiration of holiness. This leads on to a measure of desire after the good thing, and a degree of appetite for it.

But it shows a considerable growth in grace when we ardently long after it, and a still larger growth when the soul breaks because of these longings. It is a blessed thing when the soul is so stretched with desire that it is ready to snap, or when, like a vessel full of fermenting liquor, the working within threatens to break up the vessel altogether.

The text represents the agonizing of an earnest soul. Such a state of things shows a considerable advancement in the divine life, but when a believer has those desires "at all times," then is he not far from being a full-grown Christian.

"Oh," say you, "he thinks so little of what he has that he is crushed under the burden of desire for more." Yes, and he is the very man who has most of spiritual wealth. Those desires are mysterious entries in the account book of his heart, and rightly read they prove his wealth, for in the divine life the more a man desires the more he has already obtained.

You may make tallies of your desires, and as you reckon by those tallies, they shall tell you to a penny what your spiritual wealth is. The more full a man is of grace, the more he hungers for grace. Strange it is to say so, but the paradox is true—the more he drinks and the more he is satisfied and ceases to thirst in one sense, the more is he devoured with thirst after the living God. It is an advanced experience, then.

And it is an experience which I cannot quite describe to you, except by saying that it is *a bitter sweet*, or rather, a sweet bitter, if the adjective is to be stronger than the noun. There is a bitterness about being crushed with desire. It is inevitable that there should be, but the aroma of this bitter herb is inexpressibly sweet, no perfume can excel it. After all, a bruised heart knows more peace and rest than a heart filled with the world's delights. How safe such a soul is.

"Oh," said one, "I cannot go to hell, it is impossible, because I must love Jesus Christ and long after Him. It is not possible for Him to forbid me the privilege of loving Him, and to love Him and long for Him is happiness." Better to feel a heavenly hunger than a worldly fullness. Heartbreak for God is a sweeter thing than content in sinful pleasures. There is an inexpressible sweetness, a dawning of heaven, in longing after God, and yet because you feel you have not yet attained what you desire, there is a bitter mixed with it.

I think the only thing that honey wants to improve it is just a touch of bitter or acid in it. When you eat much honey it begins to cloy, because it is all sweet, but just a taste of lemon or a dash of quassia might strengthen the taste, and enable it to take in a fresh freight of sweetness.

It is surely so with true religious experience. Pangs of strong desire increase our overflowing pleasures, and the longings and hungerings make attainings and enjoyings to be all the more delightful. May the Lord send us more of this lamb with bitter herbs, this mingled experience in which we are "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

Still, those longings after God's Word may *become very wearing to a man's soul*. The sense of our text in the Hebrew is that of attrition or wearing down. Keble reads it—

"My soul is worn and wasted quite
Thy laws desiring day and night."

They wear out the man when they become so fervent as those confessed in the text. I believe that some of the Lord's holy ones have been worn down to sickness and depression by the passion of their hearts after God—their souls have become like sharp swords which cut through their scabbards, for they have destroyed the body by intense inner desires.

At times holy men draw so near to God, and pine so greatly after His glory, that for half a word they would pass the frontier and enter into heaven. They are so fully in accord with God that the shell which shuts in their soul is almost broken, and the newborn spirit is ready for its fullest life and liberty. How blessed to shake off the last fragment of that which holds us back from the freedom of an immortal life in perfect agreement with God. Oh to attain to this!

One saint cried, "Let me see the face of God," and another answered, "You cannot see God's face and live." To which he replied, "Then let me see my God and die." So do we feel that our soul comes near to dying with her longings after her God. Little would we tremble, even if we knew that the joy of realization would be killing, and would pass us over the border into Immanuel's land, where we shall see the King in His beauty.

But I must not linger, though there is much to tempt me to speak on. Are you searching yourselves, brethren, to see whether you have such longings? If so, do you have them, "at all times"? We are not to long for God's Word and will by fits and starts—we are not to have desires awakened by novelty or by excitement. Nor are we to long for divine things because for a while temporal things fail us, and we are sick and sorry, and weary of the world, and so in disgust turn to God.

Brethren, I trust you long after God when all is bright in providence, and that you love His Word when all is pleasant in family affairs. It is well to desire the Lord's will when He is permitting you to have your own will as well as when He is thwarting you. God is to always be our delight. He is our defense in war, but He is also our joy in peace.

Do not use Him as sailors use those harbors of refuge for which they are not bound, into which they only run into in time of storm, but if it be fair they stand far out to sea. The Lord's will is to be the path of our feet, and Himself the element of our life. This it is to be a true child of God, *always* to have a yearning soul towards God's commandments—to be eager after His Word "at all times." May the Holy Spirit keep us ever hungering and thirsting after God and His truth.

III. And now I am going to close with a few cheering reflections.

Methinks this morning some heart has been saying, "There are comforting thoughts for me in all this. I am a poor thing, I have not grown much, I have not done much. I wish I had, but I have strong longings. I am very dissatisfied, and I am almost ready to die with desire after Christ."

My dear soul, listen—let this encourage you. First, *God is at work in your soul*. Never did a longing after God's judgments grow up in the soul of itself. Weeds come up of themselves, but the rarer kind of plants I warrant you will never be found where there has been no sowing. And this flower, called love-lies-bleeding—this plant of intense eagerness after God—never sprang up in the human breast of itself. God alone has placed it there.

Friend, there was a time when you had no such longing. Ah, and if you were left to yourself, you would never have such longing again. You would decline till you became as content with the world as others are. You know you would.

Come, then, beloved, God is at work in your soul—let this comfort you. The great Potter has you upon the wheel—He has not cast you away as worthless—His work may pain you, but it is honorable and glorious. Your heart may swell with unutterable longings, and it may be torn by throes of desire, but

life thus proves its presence, and reaches forth to something yet beyond. These pains of desire are the Lord's doings, and they should be perceived with gratitude.

The result of God's work is very precious. Come, though it be only a gracious desire, thank God for it. Though you canst get no further than holy longing, be grateful for that longing. I would have you strive for the highest gifts, but I would not have you despise what God has already given you.

I have known times when I thought myself in a very strange case, and I judged ill of myself, and yet a month or two afterwards I have looked back upon that condition which I condemned, and I have wished that I could return to it.

Has it not been so with you? You have been racked with sighs, groans, cravings, and other forms of unrest, and you have said, "O God, deliver me from this sore travail." But when within a week, you have had to lament insensibility and lukewarmness, you have cried, "Lord, put me back into my state of desire! Lord, set me hungering and thirsting again, a fierce appetite is better than this deadness."

Oh, you that are longing, be thankful that you do long, for you have a rich promise to cheer you, since it is written, "He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him." The more wretched and unhappy you are under a sense of sin, the more grateful you ought to be for tenderness of heart. And the more you are longing to lay on Christ and to become like Christ, the more you should thank God that He has wrought this selfsame thing in you. How sweet is that word, "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear."

Hearken, once again—not only is the desire precious, but *it is leading on to something more precious*. Hear you that which is written, "The desire of the righteous shall be granted."

What say you to such words as these? "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them."

Do you think that God prompts us to desire a thing which He does not mean to bestow upon us? Is that the way you treat your children? I know you will play with the little ones sometimes, and hold a nut or a penny in your closed hand, and bid them open your fingers for themselves. But you give them their treat before long.

You would not hold a sweetmeat before a poor child and promise it to him, and excite his desires for it, and then refuse him a taste of it—that were a cruel pastime. God is not unkind—if He makes you hunger, for that hunger He has made ready the bread of heaven. If He makes you thirst, for that thirst He has already filled the river of the water of life. If the desire comes from God, the supply of that desire will as certainly come from God. Rest you sure of that, and cry mightily to Him with strong faith in His goodness.

Meanwhile, *the desire itself is doing you good*. It is driving you out of yourself, it is making you feel what a poor creature you are, for you can dig no well in your own nature, and find no supplies within your own spirit. It is compelling you to look alone to God.

Do not need much compelling. Come readily to your Lord. Be one of those vessels which can sail with a capful of wind. Come by faith to Jesus, even though you fear that your desires are by no means so vivid and intense as those of my text.

Believe and you shall be established. Rest assured of this, that there is in God whatever your soul wants. In Christ Jesus dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and in that divine fullness there must of necessity be more than a creature can require. In Christ Jesus there is exactly what your soul is panting for.

Yes, I mean you, weakest of the flock. You, feeblest of the saints. You who dare not put your names down among God's people at all—if there is a sacred longing in your spirit, there is that in Christ which is adapted to you, despite your feebleness and unworthiness. God is ready to give you whatever you are ready to receive. Only come and trust Him for it, and look to His dear Son, for in Jesus you have all things.

Oh, this is the blessedness of this longing after God's judgments, that *it makes Christ precious*. And with that remark, I have done. We see all God's Word in Christ. We see all God's decisions against sin and for righteousness embodied in our Savior. We see that if we can get Christ, we have then found the wisdom of God, and the power of God, and in fact, the all-sufficiency of God. If we can become like Christ we shall be like God Himself. This, I say, makes Christ so precious, and makes us long to get more fully to know Him and to call Him ours.

Come, you longing ones, come to my Lord Jesus even now! Come, you that are bursting with wishes and desires, come and trust the Savior, and rest in Him now. And may this be the hour in which you shall find how true it is, "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." May you yet sing the Virgin's song, "He hath filled the hungry with good things. My soul doth magnify the Lord."

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
PSALM 119:17-24, 81-88

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—912, 119 (SONG I.), 119 (SONG VI.)

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.