

Five Years With the Indwelling Christ

by Daniel Steele

Daniel Steele reflects on five transformative years of experiencing the indwelling Christ and the profound impact of His love and presence in his life.

Scripture: John 14:16, Romans 8:1, Romans 15:13, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 3:17, Philippians 1:6, Colossians 1:27, 1 John 4:13

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Sanctification"

Description

Daniel Steele reflects on the profound spiritual manifestation of Jesus Christ to him as the perfect Savior from all sin on the 17th of November, emphasizing the transformative power of Christ's love that changed his 'I must' into 'I will,' and his duty into delight. Steele testifies to the indescribable joy and freedom found in surrendering his will to God's will, experiencing the highest form of freedom on earth. He shares how the love of Jesus compelled him to share his testimony and the glorious deliverance he experienced, unable to fully express the greatness of God's love. Steele's theology of the Holy Spirit becomes clear and experiential, leading to a deeper understanding of the Trinity and the essential role of the Spirit in transforming believers' lives.

Transcript

IT is the 17th of November, the anniversary of the spiritual manifestation of Jesus Christ to me as the perfect Saviour from all sin -- an event transcending all others in my sojourn on the earth. To the salvation wrought on that day so long as I can move tongue or pen I must testify. Rather, I will testify. How sweet the constraining love of Christ, like a furnace-blast melting the "I must" into the "I will," duty into delight. This is the highest freedom possible in earth or heaven, when my will elects God's will with unspeakable gladness.

"I love Thee so, I know not how

My transports to control;

My love is like a burning fire

Within my very soul."

O, Lord Jesus, often during these five wonderful years have I wearied an unbelieving world and a half-believing Church with my attestations of Thy marvelous power to save. But all my utterances fail to

express the greatness and the blessedness of that glorious deliverance. I cannot compass in thought, much less in words, the immensity of Thy love, an ocean without bottom or brim. I cannot tell the story, and I cannot let it alone. By Thy grace, blessed Holy Spirit and abiding Comforter, I will not cease the attempt

"Till this poor lisping, stammering tongue,

Lies silent in the grave."

And not then; for I will then vie with Gabriel, and out-sing him too, when I touch the strain which is not in all his creation anthem -- Salvation through the blood of the Lamb. During these cloudless, blissful years -- dare I write it -- my soul and body have been the abode of the indwelling Christ, consciously "the habitation of God through the Spirit."

Pythagoras enjoined upon his disciples a five-years' novitiate of silence. It was a command easily kept, for the frigid Grecian philosophy had no secret which constrained utterance. But the love of Jesus, fully shed abroad in the heart by the blessed Carrier Dove of heaven, is a mystery that must be divulged. Silence is impossible. The lips of the fully initiated believer are unsealed, and words sweeter than Hymettian honey, which bedewed the lips of the infant Plato, flow forth. Plato could keep his "divine peradventures" till the next banquet of the philosophers; but my divine assurances cannot be kept like the cold, impersonal abstractions of philosophy, Love must have a tongue. Love brooks no delay.

"Tis love that drives my chariot wheels."

So far as a page of limping words can compass the mighty theme, I essay the hopeless task of portraying the glory of the indwelling Christ, that His grace may be magnified, and all His people may invite Him unto their hearts as a permanent inhabitant; for I cannot believe that my experience is necessarily exceptional. I should dishonor the boundless grace and salvation of God, if I measured the possible in the attainments of the Church, by the actual. Results reached by one believer, while trusting the general promises of God's Word, are possible to all, for there is no respect of persons with Him.

How Jesus the adorable Saviour has grown in my soul's estimation during these cloudless years! What glories His heart of love has unfolded to me! What raptures fill my heart when I see Him reflected in the fourfold mirror of the Gospels, and follow His ascent into the highest heaven, carrying a human heart to the mediatorial throne! Almost every week, and sometimes every day, the pressure of His great love comes down upon my heart in such measure as to make my brain throb and my whole being, soul and body, groan beneath the strain of the almost insupportable plethora of joy. And yet amid this fullness there is a hunger for more, and amid the consuming flame of love the paradoxical cry is ever on my lips: --

"Burn, burn, O Love! within my heart,

Burn fiercely night and day,

Till all the dross of earthly loves,

Is burned, and burned away."

It is not strange that those great formulas of the Prayer Book, the Te Deum Laudamus, the Gloria in Excelsis, and the Creator Veni Spiritus, which once seemed extravagant in their cumulation of titles

ascribed to Christ and the Comforter, and tedious in their repetitions, have become the natural language of my soul in the constant glow of devotion, as they have been the canticles through which the Bride, for fifteen centuries, has poured out her love into the willing ear of her heavenly Bridegroom.

How has my theology of the Holy Ghost lost its vagueness and taken on clearness and distinctness! His personality and His offices in transfiguring believing souls are no longer dry dogmas, to be accepted on the authority of revelation, but are experimental verities, without which, I now clearly see, the Gospel would fail to transform a single soul. I begin to see a little way into the fathomless mystery of the Trinity, far enough to see that it is not revealed as a puzzle to confound reason and test faith; but that it is of experimental and practical importance in the glorious Gospel of the Son of God. It has become as evident as the midday sun that he who would realize the most perfect transformation of divine love must, through faith, receive its outpouring from the Holy Spirit through Jesus, the appointed channel from the Father's heart, a shoreless sea of love.

"O blessed Trinity

Holy, unfathomable, infinite,

Thou are all life, and love, and light.

Holy Trinity!

Blessed equal Three,

One God, we praise Thee."

As I have gazed down into this fathomless ocean of truth and love, my soul has exulted in the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus to the loving and obedient heart that receives the Comforter, "My Father will love him, and WE will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

In my previous Christian experience of twenty-eight years there always seemed to be a vacancy unfilled, a spot which the plowshare of the gospel had not touched. My nature had not been thoroughly subsoiled and thrown up to the light and warmth of the Sun of righteousness. I loved Jesus, studied His character with increasing admiration, and preached Him with delight. But there was always a painful sense that my love was fractional, the response of only a part of my being, a meagre tribute from the wealth of my capacity. I was often more enthusiastic in other things than in devotion to the King of glory, the adorable Jesus. Hence, when I surveyed the cross of Christ there was a feeling of self-reproach, a semi-condemnation for the feebleness of my gratitude and the faintness of my love. But the heavenly Tenant of my soul has changed all this. He has unlocked every apartment of my being, and filled and flooded them all with the light of His radiant presence. The vacuum has become a plenum. The spot before untouched has been reached, and all its flintiness has melted in the presence of that universal solvent,

"Love divine, all loves excelling."

I now wish that I had a thousand-heart-power to love, and a thousand-tongue-capacity to proclaim Jesus, the One altogether lovely, the complete Saviour, who "is able also to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him." Nevertheless, I have the delicious assurance that my present capacities, dwarfed as they are by former apathy and sin, are all filled to the brim with love to Christ and my fellowmen; and

that every faculty is strained to its highest tension in His delightful service. Blissful, indeed, is the consciousness of the wholeness of my love to Jesus, flowing from all the hidden fountains of my heart, like the Mississippi to the Gulf. "All my springs are in Thee." O the indescribable sweetness of this perfect love, after many years of love painfully imperfect and divided! What that void within was -- what that untouched core of my being whether it was selfishness, unbelief, original or inbred sin -- I leave to the theologians to discuss. I aver that it was something very uncomfortable. Praise the Lord Jesus, it is gone, never to return. Joy did not go with it, but stays behind it. The Man of Calvary, the Son of God, treads all the avenues of my soul, melting its hardness, cleansing its impurity, filling its emptiness, and pouring upon my head

"The blessed unction from above,

Comfort, life, and fire of love."

My experience often reminds me of the results of integral calculus, namely: two kinds of quantities, constants and variables. The constants in my spiritual life are: --

1. Salvation from doubt. I once walked much amid the shadows, having a streak of sunshine sandwiched with streaks of twilight, with occasionally darkness that could be felt. How changed is all this now, "through the full assurance of understanding, the full assurance of faith, the full assurance of hope," the contents of which are that I am now and for ever wholly the Lord's! This assurance has not been interrupted for one moment for five years. This is the most astonishing triumph of grace over a temperament naturally melancholic, an introspecting, self-anatomizing, and self-accusing style of piety characteristic of my ancestry.[* The writer is a lineal descendant, in the fourth generation, of the father of David Brainerd, the missionary.] This magnifies the power of Jesus to save, more than any other aspect of my experience.

2. The death of personal ambition. To all desire of self-promotion and self-aggrandizement, to the glory of God's grace let it be said, I feel as dead as the autumn leaves beneath my feet as I tread the streets of Lynn on this gusty November day. It was different once. There was once a desire for the applause of men, a name resounding in the trumpet of fame. It was not inordinate and noticeable by my friends; but it existed as an uneasy tenant of my bosom, the spring of many of my actions, and a motive mingling with all my aspirations to serve God. But five years ago, this blessed day, an unalloyed spring of action, the motive power of unmingled love to Jesus and the race for which He shed His blood was fixed within by the Holy Spirit. It is no longer the old nature that lives, but Christ Jesus. That a resurrection of the self that has been crucified, dead, and buried for years is possible, I do not deny. I am not divining the future, but chronicling my footsteps in the past for the benefit of my fellow-believers: --

"Footprints, that perhaps another,

Sailing o'er life's solemn main,

A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,

Seeing, shall take heart again."

3. Perfect rest from all apprehension of future ill. Salvation from worry is no small thing, especially in the case of one whose views of life are strongly tinged with indigo. Fear and faith cannot keep house together. When one enters the other departs. I believe that Jesus, who is head over all things to His Church, has the programme of my best possible future, which involves these two elements: --

His highest glory through me.

My highest happiness in Him.

It is the mission of the Comforter to lead me, step by step, through this programme, till Christ's ideal of my earthly life is fully realized. My only anxiety, moment by moment, is this: Am I now led by the Spirit of God? Just what the hidden plan of my future is, so long as it is the will of Jesus, is no concern of mine. The veil that hides it is woven by the fingers of Mercy.

"Ill that He blesses is my good,

And unblest good is ill;

And all is right that seems most wrong,

If it be His sweet will!"

4. Oneness with Christ. Eckhart's beggar saint, a poor, blind man, whose feet were torn and covered with dust, standing in rags by the way-side, rejoicing in Christ amid sunshine and rain, hunger and cold, was catechized by a learned man, seeking rest of soul. His last and hardest question was this: "But if God should cast thee into hell, what wouldst thou do?" He replied "I should have two arms to embrace Him withal. One arm is true humility, and therewith am I one with His holy humanity. And with the other right arm of love, that joineth His holy Godhead, I would embrace Him, so He must go with me into hell likewise. And so I would sooner be in hell and have God, than in heaven and not have Him." I have no better words with which to express my sense of eternal oneness with Christ. He is not a capricious dweller in the temple of my heart, present today and absent tomorrow. He abides. Yet I have, as a free agent, the suicidal power of sundering that blissful union.

5. Faith is a steady, living principle, in marked contrast with the isolated, spasmodic efforts of my former experience. It is as natural as breathing, and as unconsciously done.

6. Love has been a well of water within, "springing into everlasting life," instead of an intermittent brooklet, ice-bound in mid-winter, and dried up in midsummer.

7. Peace, the legacy of Jesus, changes not.

These constants all flow forth from the abiding Comforter, the indwelling Christ. But the following variables result from the leaky vessel into which the water of life is poured: --

1. The joy of realization ebbs and flows. The very etymology of emotion indicates that it is always moving, waxing or waning. Still, what St. Paul styles "the joy of faith" is as permanent as faith itself. But above this occasionally roll the great tidal waves of ecstatic joy, deluging the soul for days in succession. Under this mighty pressure of the heavenly world upon my poor throbbing heart I often feel that the earthen vessel will break under the strain, and that I shall die of very gladness.

2. Agony of souls. It is a mercy that this is a variable experience. The Lord Jesus was in Gethsemane only a few hours, and even then He was strengthened by an angel. My occasional hours of intense burden and distress for souls are usually followed by the conversion or spiritual emancipation of some one among my people. I sometimes see hours in which I would willingly die to save a soul from eternal death. Thankful as I am for these hours of sympathy with the suffering Saviour, I am grateful that they are hours, and not days

nor years. "He knoweth my frame."

3. Temptation. Satan's arrows fly thicker at times, but they strike upon my shield like spent shot, and fall harmless at my feet. As the years roll by their impact is more and more feeble, indicating that the vanquished foe is on the retreat, or, rather, that I am receding from his ambushade, and nearing that sea of glass on which I shall exchange my shield for a harp of victory, for ever beyond the range of Satan's fiery darts. This waning of his power in temptation is the normal Christian experience at its best estate. Abraham's greatest trial was in his old age, but it was from the Lord, and not from Satan. Job's grand duel with the tempter was in advanced life; but so unnatural was this conflict at this time that Satan could not approach the confirmed saint of Uz till God had given him a special permit to pass the lines of the angel of the Lord encamping round about him. After the devil's threefold Waterloo defeat at the beginning of Christ's ministry, he left him "for a season." But none of the evangelists have chronicled the renewed attack. Is it not because the assault was so feeble that none of them noticed it? Did not the sword of Apollyon so faintly fall upon the helmet of Jesus that the clash was heard by none of the twelve, not even by John, who leaned upon His bosom? The terrific combats of Bunyan's Pilgrim with Satan all occur early in the journey. By and by Christian reaches a land where these have entirely ceased, and "Doubting Castle is clear out of sight."

4. Access in prayer and grasp upon the divine promises is a variable which we have not space to discuss; nor

5. The openings of the Scriptures under the apparently varying intensity of the Spirit's illumination, but really through some hidden law of my own mental and physical nature. But Jesus is no variable.

"Changed, and not changed, Thy present charms,

The past ones only prove;

O make my heart more strong to bear

This newness of Thy love!"

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/daniel-steele/five-years-with-the-indwelling-christ/>

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