

# Seeking and Not Finding

by Daniel Steele

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in Jesus Christ and the need for self-abandonment in order to experience perfect love and full salvation.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 51:17, Matthew 16:24, Mark 1:15, Luke 9:23, Romans 12:1, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 3:8, Hebrews 12:2, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6

**Topics:** "True Faith", "Repentance"

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## Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the importance of true faith in Jesus Christ for the pardon of sins and the rest of faith, emphasizing the need for repentance before belief. He discusses the necessity of reaching a state of nothingness in order to fully trust in Christ and experience purity of heart. Steele highlights the struggles and hindrances that prevent believers from reaching this state of complete surrender and faith, pointing out that self-abandonment is essential for oneness with Christ and perfect love.

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## Transcript

THERE are many persons who seek the pardon of their sins who do not find that great blessing. There are various reasons; but the chief one lies in the fact that the unsuccessful seekers do not really trust in Jesus Christ. They are told to trust, and they try, and they think that they do, but they are mistaken. The truth is, that saving faith is possible only in a certain state of mind. There is a divinely prescribed and irreversible order of duties: first, repent; and secondly, believe. When a sinner feels that he is lost, and loathes his sins, he is more than half saved. Trust in Christ for forgiveness is possible only to one who realizes his utter helplessness.

There are also many who seek but do not find the rest of faith or love made perfect, variously styled the higher life, entire sanctification, or evangelical perfection. Various are the reasons for failure, but the chief one is a lack of faith in Christ, the living High-priest, and Giver of the Holy Ghost the Sanctifier. As in the case of the penitent sinner a certain state of mind is requisite to the faith that saves, so in the case of the Christian believer seeking purity of heart, before he can exercise perfect trust he must reach a certain state. That state is a sense of nothingness. Hence Charles Wesley sings --

"Now let me gain perfection's height!

Now let me into nothing fall!

As less than nothing in Thy sight,

And feel that Christ is all in all."

To the same point does Theodore Monod come, in that beautiful little hymn, "The Altered Motto," written during the Oxford Convention, the last line of each of the last three verses expressing the gradual approach of the believer, struggling towards the point of nothingness --

"Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow,

That a time could ever be

When I let the Saviour's pity

Plead in vain, and proudly answered,

'All of self, and none of Thee!'

"Yet He found me; I beheld Him

Bleeding on the accursed tree;

Heard Him pray, 'Forgive them Father!'

And my wistful heart said faintly,

'Some of self, and some of Thee!'

"Day by day His tender mercy,

Healing, helping, full and free,

Sweet and strong, and ah! so patient,

Brought me lower, while I whispered,

'Less of self, and more of Thee!'

"Higher than the highest heavens,

Deeper than this deepest sea,

Lord, Thy love at last hath conquered;

Grant me now my soul's desire,

'None of self, and all of Thee!'"

Many, indeed, are the professed Christians who get no farther than the first verse. A large number of accepted souls live in that mixed state expressed by the second. Too many aim at nothing more than the state aspired to in the third. Happy indeed are the few who can shout over the accomplished fact in their experience --

"None of self, and all of Thee!"

Those lights of the dark ages, stigmatized as mystics, Bernard, Hugo, Eckhart, and Tauler, heroic souls of whom their age was not worthy, however great their theoretical errors, were certainly right in their central doctrine of the perfect abnegation of self as a prerequisite to entire devotion to God.

But now comes the practical question, How may I reach the state of nothingness? Is it a gift of God, or is it attainable by my own exertions? In a sense it is both. Every step Christward is of grace, and grace is of God. But this grace assists our efforts, and is ineffectual without them.

At the same time we are to remember the divine command, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God," as implying that our wills are to be active in sinking out of self into God. St. Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." The power of divine grace had nailed Him to the cross, but he had sought this very crucifixion, and willingly yielded His hands to the spikes, His side to the spear, and His head to the thorn-crown. The hostility of the self-life to this sudden and violent extinction is the chief hindrance to faith, "How can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" Jesus indicates that the self-life finds its chief nutriment in the esteem and applause of our fellow-men. It is not by accident that in every age those who have fully consecrated themselves to Christ, and have been entirely sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and have proclaimed this is the privilege and duty of all Christians, have been under a cloud of reproach. Christ has set reproach and persecution as two cherubim at the gate of the Eden of perfect love, to test the consecration, courage, and confidence of all who seek to enter. They who lack any one of these qualities must be excluded from this paradise. Dear seeker of soul-rest, are you willing to have your name cast out as evil, meekly to wear opprobrious names, to be accounted as the filth and off-scouring of all things for your testimony to Christ as a perfect Saviour, able to save unto the uttermost? But, say you, is this the indispensable condition? In this age of enlightenment and religious liberty has not the offence of the cross ceased? Nay, verily, except to a world-conforming sort of Christians, who keep up a state of peace with the world and a truce with the devil by declaring that they consciously sin every day, and that there is no efficacy in the blood of Christ to cleanse the heart of its depravity, and no power in the Holy Spirit to keep the trusting soul from sinning. Jesus wishes that all who propose to follow Him fully should count the cost, and not shrink back in disappointment when they find that He has not where, in worldly honours, to lay His head. Hence total and irreversible self-abandonment is the indispensable condition of that oneness with Christ, that harmony with God, which, in scriptural phrase, is called perfect love.

This must be the language of the lip and the sincere meaning of the heart:--

"Take my soul and body's powers:

Take my memory, mind, and will,

All my goods and all my hours,

All I know and all I feel,

All I think or speak or do;

Take my heart,-- but make it new."

When the will gladly makes this unconditional consecration, it is easy to trust unwaveringly in Christ as the uttermost Saviour. In fact, when the self-life expires, the fulness of the Spirit comes in as naturally as the air rushes into a vacuum. Faith then becomes as natural as breathing. We create the vacuum by dethroning our idols.

The whole question relating to the faith that leads the believer into full salvation is simply whether he will sell all to buy this pearl of great price. Nearly all the delay, difficulty, and danger lies at this point, a reluctance to part with all things. Self can assert itself just as effectually in a little as in a great thing. If self has life and strength enough to cling to a straw, it has power to bar the gate to perfect soul-rest.

It is said that a traveller by night fell into a dry well. His cry for help attracted a neighbour, who let down a rope and attempted to draw him up, but did not succeed, because the rope kept slipping through his hands. At length the rescuer, suspecting that the man's grip was feeble because of his having something in his hands besides the rope, called out to him, "Have you not something in your hands?" "Yes," replied the man at the bottom, "I have a few precious parcels which I should like to save as well as myself." When at last he became willing to drop his parcels, there was muscular power enough in his hands to hold fast the rope till he was drawn up.

My dear friend, seeking purity of heart, and still finding yourself, day after day, in the horrible pit of impurity, though the golden chain of a complete salvation is lowered to you from above, have you not something in your hands? How about those precious parcels? Have you dropped them all? Then lay hold on the hope that is set before thee, and keep hold till thy feet are on the rock, and songs of deliverance burst forth from thy lips, and thy goings are henceforth established in the highway of holiness. Is that last parcel too precious to be dropped? Well, say then, "I will not give up my idol," and no longer dishonour God by saying "I cannot believe."

All unbelief touches God at a tender point. "I ... am a jealous God." With God, as with man, the question of veracity is so wrapped up with His honour that He cannot be indifferent toward those who disbelieve His word. But men are prone to locate all their religious difficulties outside of themselves, and in so doing the divine truthfulness is impeached. Unsuccessful seeker, look within, for the hindrances to your faith -- in that small idol, so small as almost to need a microscope to see it; in that indulgence, which you know wars against your highest spirituality; in that other gratification, of which you stand in doubt, and yet give self and not God the benefit of the doubt; in that slight omission, of which conscience once spoke quite clearly, but now with a lessening emphasis. Appear before God with a perfect willingness to do His will, and you will find faith springing up spontaneously in your heart.

Religious unbelief, in all its forms, has not an intellectual, but a moral, cause. The difficulty is not with our faculties, nor with the evidences, but with our moral state, our wills, our disposition to follow unhesitatingly wherever truth leads.

Let the reader who has asked and received not, examine himself in the light of the truth set forth in this chapter, and pray for the illuminating Spirit to reveal the hindrances to faith. Then let him consecrate all to God for the glory of His Son, and expect the baptism of fire to purge his heart from all sin.

"Bend with Thy fires our stubborn will,

And quicken what the world would chill,

And homeward call the feet that stray;  
Virtue's reward and final grace,  
The eternal vision face to face,  
Spirit of Love! for these we pray."

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