

## THE BLESSEDNESS OF LONGING

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At first thought, a condition of longing would seem to be undesirable, and far from blessedness. Longing suggests unhappiness, discontent, the absence of that peace which seems to us to represent the loftiest state of blessedness, and the highest ideal of the life of faith. To have all our longings satisfied, we are apt to regard as the most desirable human condition. Yet, when we think more deeply of it—we know that there is a blessedness in longing.

We remember that one of our Lord's beatitudes was for those who long. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." Longing is, then, a healthful state; one that has an upward look—and has the promise of spiritual enriching. Satisfaction with one's attainments or achievements in any line—but especially in spiritual life and in personal holiness—is an unhealthy condition—and may be a mark of incipient spiritual decay.

In all of life, this law applies. In the physical realm, hunger is a mark of health—and the lack of appetite proclaims disease. So the mind grows through longing. The doors of knowledge are opened to the student's eye, giving a glimpse of the boundless fields that stretch in all directions, and producing a craving, a hunger to know, which leads him to seek with eagerness for the rich treasures of wisdom. So long as this mind-hunger continues, the quest for knowledge will continue, and ever new stores will be discovered. But, whenever the hunger ceases, mental growth is at an end, and the mind has gained and passed its best achievements.

In spiritual life the same is true. There is no mood so hopeful as longing. The highest state is one of hunger and thirst—intense desire for more life, more holiness, more power, closer communion with God, more of the divine likeness in the soul. The gospel promises rest to those who come to Christ. Peace was one of the benedictions the Savior left for his people. Contentment is one of the graces and duties enjoined upon the Christian—but spiritual hunger is not incompatible with either peace or contentment. It is not unrest; it is not anxiety or worry; it is not murmuring discontent. It is deep longing for more and ever more of all blessings—calmer rest, sweeter peace, more perfect contentment, with richer heart-fullness of Christ, and more and more of all the graces of the Spirit.

This longing is depicted in the Psalms, as an intense thirst for God; not the bitter cry of an unforgiven soul for mercy—but the deep, passionate yearning of a loving spirit for closer, fuller, richer, more satisfying communion with God himself. We find it in the life of the greatest of the apostles, who, wherever we see him, on whatever radiant height, is still pressing on, with unsatisfied longing and quenchless ardor—toward loftier summits and more radiant peaks, crying ever for more intimate knowledge of Christ, and more and more of the fullness of God. The ideal Christian life is one of insatiable thirst, never pausing in any arbor of spiritual contentment—but ever wooed on by visions of new joys and attainments.

The absence of this longing manifests the cessation of spiritual growth. Longing is the very soul of all true prayer. If we desire nothing more—we will ask nothing more. Longing is the empty hand reached out to receive new gifts from heaven! It is the heart's cry which God hears with acceptance, and answers with more and more. It is the ascending angel that climbs the starry ladder to return on the same radiant stairway with blessings from God's very throne! Longing is the key that unlocks new storehouses of divine goodness and enrichment. It is the bold navigator that ventures out on unknown seas, and discovers new continents. Longing is, indeed, nothing less than the very life of God in the human soul, struggling to grow up in us into the fullness of the stature of Christ. Longing is the transfiguring spirit which purifies these dull, earthly lives of ours, and changes them little by little into the divine image.

Continued longing after God's blessings—lifts us up into the blessings. The heavenly ideal ever kept before the mind, and longed after with intensity of desire—carves itself in the soul.

If longing is God's angel to lead us heavenward, we must follow where the angel leads. Yet mere longing opens no gates, takes us to no heights, finds no rich treasures, discovers no new worlds. Longing without action is a most unhealthy state; it is but a poor sentimental day-dreaming, which leaves the soul more empty than ever, when the dreams have vanished. Longing, to be blessed, must become an inspiration.

When Raphael was asked how he painted such wonderful pictures, he said, "I dream dreams, and see visions; and then I paint my dreams and my visions!" With marvelous skill his hand wrought into forms of radiant beauty—the lovely creations of his mind. Otherwise they would never have brightened the world with their wondrous splendors.

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Longing not only sees the heavenly visionsâ€”but is obedient to them, and strivesâ€”to realize them. It struggles up toward the excellence that shines before it. It seeks to attain the fine qualities which it admires. It is not satisfied with good resolvesâ€”but sets forward to make them come true.

So, when we send out the white banners of pure and noble longings, we must be sure to follow them ourselves, if we would win the blessings which our hearts crave.

Every longing should at once become an active impulse in the soul. The hand should instantly be reached out to paint or carve the beauty of which the heart dreams, and for which it longs. Our longings should lead us into all paths of Christly service and all heroic duty. Mere gazing heavenward after the ascended Christ, and waiting and watching for his returnâ€”is not the way to realize the blessed glory. There is work to do to prepare for his coming, and he will come soonest and with greatest joyâ€”to those who do most to advance his kingdom.