

Madame Guyon

• A Searching Heart •

“Madame...you seek
without what you
have within.”



(1648-1717)

The influence of Madame Guyon's inner life experiences of the Lord has filtered down to many of the most spiritually-minded saints in the history of the church — John Wesley, Hermann Francke, Andrew Murray, Jessie Penn-Lewis, Watchman Nee, and countless others.

The revelation of Christ that transformed her entire life was the simple discovery that Christ was in her. This revelation was similar to the apostle Paul's in Galatians 1:16. Prior to that time she had passed through a long journey of searching after God. As a young girl she had sought for God under her Roman Catholic environment and understanding. She kept times of private prayer, visited the poor, read devotional books, subjected herself to bodily austerities, made vows, and even made a resolution to enter a convent to become a nun.

While she was searching for God, Madame passed through periods in which He allowed her to see the depths of her corruption. During one of these times, she was living in Paris and, under God's dealing, was left to herself. She became vain in her deportment, read romance novels, became proud of her beauty, spent a good deal of her time in front of the mirror, walked the streets to be noticed, and received several marriage proposals.

About this time her father arranged a marriage for her. She did not meet her husband-to-be until three days before their wedding. She soon saw that this marriage was to be "a house of mourning" for her in which all her earthly hopes were "blasted." Many trials, sorrows, and sufferings followed in her domestic environment. Her unpleasant mother-in-law, who lived with them, constantly influenced Madame's husband against her. Madame felt like a slave in her own household.

In the midst of these troubles, she passed through cycles of searching after God, in which she made new resolutions to change and then found herself breaking those resolutions. While experiencing this state of failure and defeat, she came in contact with three people who were used by God to direct her to Christ. One was a truly pious lady who was able to discern and point out that Madame was seeking the Lord "by a system of works without faith." Through her, Madame realized that she was trying to gain by efforts what could only be gained

by ceasing from efforts. The second person who deeply touched her was her missionary cousin. When he visited her, he expressed a relationship with Christ that caused her to long for what he had. Finally, the Lord brought a devout man of the order of St. Francis to visit her father. The man had spent five years in solitude, and was divinely led to her father's house. It was to this godly man that Madame opened up her dissatisfaction with her spiritual condition.

From the influence of these three persons, Madame Guyon was led to discover the riches of an indwelling Christ. Here in her own words she tells the story:

I NOW APPLIED MYSELF to my duties, never failing to practice that of prayer twice a day. I watched over myself, to subdue my spirit continually. I went to visit the poor in their houses, assisting them in their distresses. I did (according to my understanding) all the good I knew.

You, O my God, increased both my love and my patience, in proportion to my sufferings. I regretted not the temporal advantages with which my mother distinguished my brother above me. Yet they fell on me about that, as about everything else. I also had for some time severe fits of fever. I did not indeed serve You yet with that fervor which You did give me soon after. For I would

still have been glad to reconcile Your love with the love of myself and of the creature. Unhappily I always found some who loved me, and whom I could not forbear wishing to please. It was not that I loved them, but it was for the love that I bore to myself.

A lady, an exile, came to my father's house. He offered her an apartment which she accepted, and she stayed a long time. She was one of true piety and inward devotion. She had a great esteem for me, because I desired to love God. She remarked that I had the virtues of an active and bustling life; but I had not yet attained the simplicity of prayer which she experienced. Sometimes she dropped a word to me on that subject. As my time had not yet come, I did not understand her. Her example instructed me more than her words. I observed on her countenance something which marked a great enjoyment of the presence of God. By the exertion of studied reflection and thoughts I tried to attain it but to little purpose. I wanted to have, by my own efforts, what I could not acquire except by ceasing from all efforts.

My father's nephew, of whom I have made mention before, was returned from Cochin China, to take over some priests from Europe. I was exceedingly glad to see him, and remembered what good he had done me. The lady mentioned was no less rejoiced than I. They understood each other immediately and conversed in a spiritual language. The virtue of this excellent relation charmed

me. I admired his continual prayer without being able to comprehend it. I endeavored to meditate, and to think on God without intermission, to utter prayers and ejaculations. I could not acquire, by all my toil, what God at length gave me Himself, and which is experienced only in simplicity. My cousin did all he could to attach me more strongly to God. He conceived great affection for me. The purity he observed in me from the corruptions of the age, the abhorrence of sin at a time of life when others are beginning to relish the pleasures of it (I was not yet eighteen), gave him a great tenderness for me. I complained to him of my faults ingenuously. These I saw clearly. He cheered and exhorted me to support myself, and to persevere in my good endeavors. He would gladly have introduced me into a more simple manner of prayer, but I was not yet ready for it. I believe his prayers were more effectual than his words.

No sooner was he gone out of my father's house, than You, O Divine Love, manifested Your favor. The desire I had to please You, the tears I shed, the manifold pains I underwent, the labors I sustained, and the little fruit I reaped from them, moved You with compassion. This was the state of my soul when Your goodness, surpassing all my vileness and infidelities, and abounding in proportion to my wretchedness, granted me in a moment, what all my own efforts could never procure. Beholding me rowing with laborious toil, the breath of Your divine

operations turned in my favor, and carried me full sail over this sea of affliction.

I had often spoken to my confessor about the great anxiety it gave me to find I could not meditate, nor exert my imagination in order to pray. Subjects of prayer which were too extensive were useless to me. Those which were short and pithy suited me better.

At length, God permitted a very religious person, of the order of St. Francis, to pass by my father's dwelling. He had intended going another way that was shorter, but a secret power changed his design. He saw there was something for him to do, and imagined that God had called him for the conversion of a man of some distinction in that country. His labors there proved fruitless. It was the conquest of my soul which was designed. As soon as he arrived he came to see my father who rejoiced at his coming. At this time I was about to be delivered of my second son, and my father was dangerously ill, expected to die. For some time they concealed his sickness from me. An indiscreet person abruptly told me. Instantly I arose, weak as I was, and went to see him. A dangerous illness came upon me. My father was recovered, but not entirely, enough to give me new marks of his affection. I told him of the strong desire I had to love God, and my great sorrow at not being able to do it fully. He thought he could not give me a more solid indication of his love than in procuring me an acquaintance with

this worthy man. He told me what he knew of him, and urged me to go and see him.

At first I made a difficulty of doing it, being intent on observing the rules of the strictest prudence. However, my father's repeated requests had with me the weight of a positive command. I thought I could not do that amiss, which I only did in obedience to him. I took a kinswoman with me. At first he seemed a little confused; for he was reserved toward women. Being newly come out of a five years' solitude, he was surprised that I was the first to address him. He spoke not a word for some time. I knew not what to attribute his silence to. I did not hesitate to speak to him, and to tell him in a few words my difficulties about prayer. Presently he replied, "It is, madame, because you seek without what you have within. Accustom yourself to seek God in your heart, and you will there find Him."¹

Having said these words, the Franciscan left me. They were to me like the stroke of a dart which pierced my heart asunder. I felt at this instant deeply wounded with the love of God — a wound so delightful, that I desired it never might be healed. These words brought into my heart what I had been seeking so many years; or rather they made me discover what was there, which I did not enjoy for want of knowing it. Oh, my Lord! You were in my heart, and demanded only the turning of my mind inward, to make me feel Your presence. Oh, infinite

Goodness! You were so near, and I ran here and there seeking You, and yet found You not. My life was a burden to me, and my happiness was within myself. I was poor in the midst of riches, and ready to perish with hunger near a table plentifully spread and a continual feast. Oh Beauty, ancient and new! Why have I known You so late? Alas, I sought You where You were not, and did not seek You where You were! It was for want of understanding these words of Your Gospel: "*The kingdom of God comes not with observation, neither shall they say, Lo, here! or lo, there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*" This I now experienced, since You did become my King, and my heart Your kingdom, where You do reign a Sovereign, and do all Your will.

I told this good man that I did not know what he had done to me; that my heart was quite changed; that God was there; for from that moment He had given me an experience of His presence in my soul — not merely as an object intellectually perceived, but as a thing really possessed after the sweetest manner. I experienced those words in the Song of Songs: "*Your name is as precious ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love You.*" For I felt in my soul an unction, which healed in a moment all my wounds. I slept not all that night, because Your love, O my God! flowed in me like delicious oil, and burned as a fire which was going to destroy all that was left of self in an instant. I was all of a sudden so

altered, that I was hardly to be known either by myself or others. I found no more those troublesome faults, or that reluctance to duty, which formerly characterized me. They all disappeared, as being consumed like chaff in a great fire.

I now became desirous that the instrument hereof might become my Director, in preference to any other. This good father, however, could not readily resolve to charge himself with my conduct, though he saw so surprising a change effected by the hand of God. Several reasons induced him to excuse himself: first, my person, then my youth, for I was only twenty years of age; and lastly, a promise he had made to God, from a distrust of himself, never to take upon himself the direction of any of our sex, unless God, by some particular providence, should charge him therewith. Upon my earnest and repeated request to him to become my Director, he said he would pray to God thereupon, and bade me do so too. As he was at prayer, it was said to him, “Fear not that charge; she is My spouse.” This, when I heard it, affected me greatly. “What!” (said I to myself) “a frightful monster of iniquity, who has done so much to offend my God, in abusing His favors, and requiting them with ingratitude — and now, thus to be declared His spouse!” After this he consented to my request.

Nothing was more easy to me now than to practice prayer. Hours passed away like moments, while I could

hardly do anything else but pray. The fervency of my love allowed me no intermission. It was a prayer of rejoicing and of possession, wherein the taste of God was so great, so pure, unblended and uninterrupted, that it drew and absorbed the powers of the soul into a profound recollection, a state of confiding and affectionate rest in God, existing without intellectual effort. For I had now no sight but of Jesus Christ alone. All else was excluded, in order to love with greater purity and energy, without any motives or reasons for loving which were of a selfish nature.²

The will absorbed the two others, the memory and understanding, into itself and concentrated them in LOVE; they still subsisted, but their operations were in a manner imperceptible and passive. They were no longer stopped or retarded by the multiplicity, but collected and united in one. So the rising of the sun does not extinguish the stars, but overpowers and absorbs them in the luster of his incomparable glory.³

The following remarks by Thomas C. Upham, Madame Guyon's primary biographer, are fitting here:

Such are the expressions in which she speaks of the remarkable change which thus passed upon her spirit — an event which opened new views, originated new feelings, instituted new relations, and gave new strength.

Too important in itself and its relations to be forgotten under any circumstances, we find her often recurring to it with those confiding, affectionate, and grateful sentiments, which it was naturally calculated to inspire. One of her poems, which Cowper has translated, expresses well the feelings which we may suppose to have existed in her at this time.

Love and Gratitude

All are indebted much to Thee,
But I far more than all
From many a deadly snare set free,
And raised from many a fall.
Overwhelm me from above,
Daily with Thy boundless love.

What bonds of gratitude I feel,
No language can declare;
Beneath the oppressive weight I reel,
'Tis more than I can bear;
When shall I that blessing prove,
To return Thee love for love?

Spirit of Charity! Dispense
Thy grace to every heart;
Expel all other spirits thence;
Drive self from every part.
Charity divine! Draw nigh;
Break the chains in which we lie.

All selfish souls, whate'er they feign,
 Have still a slavish lot;
 They boast of liberty in vain,
 Of love, and feel it not.
 He, whose bosom glows with Thee,
 He, and he alone, is free.

O blessedness all bliss above,
 When Thy pure fires prevail!
 LOVE* *only teaches what is love;*
 All other lessons fail;
 We learn its name, but not its powers,
*Experience only makes it ours.*⁴

* God is *Love*, 1 Jn. 4:8

Madame Guyon's long search to find an indwelling Christ may be similar to your own experience. Perhaps you have sought Him in the wrong places. It is possible to practice religious traditions and rituals and yet not find Christ. You can even be doing the right "spiritual" things and still miss Him. The woman at the well in John 4 had a concept of finding God in outward places, but the Lord redirected her to find Him in her spirit.

In John 4:20 the woman said to Jesus, "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Her seeking was fixed on outward things. Then Jesus turned her away from the outward religious things to her spirit.

In verses 21-24 He says, ²¹“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.... ²³But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Madame Guyon had been seeking *without* what she had *within*. In the same way, God’s work over us is on the inside. That is the meaning of regeneration — Another Life enters into your spirit. Jesus Christ comes into you to impart His life into your deepest part, your human spirit. He becomes an inner source, an inner supply, an inner fountain. He Himself becomes your life (Col. 3:4).

It is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit speak of the inner work of God that is done in us and to us.

You need not prolong your frustration and your failure in seeking to find Him. He is in your mouth and in your heart, and now if you “confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:8-9). You will find Him within by His name (John 20:31). The Christ without will become to you the Christ within.

