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The Pursuit of God

A. W. Tozer

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SACRED ROOTS SPIRITUAL CLASSICS 10

THE PURSUIT OF GOD

A. W. Tozer

Edited by
Glen G. Scorgie



THEOLOGY & ETHICS

What “They” Say . . . What Will You Say?

The Pursuit of God invites us to a scripturally grounded, mystical encounter with the Triune God, to bring our total personalities into conformity with God’s, so that we may become heavenly minded enough to be of great earthly good. The discussion questions and editorial comments in this special edition facilitate both individual and group study and thereby increase the transformational potential of Tozer’s classic work.

~ H. D. “Sandy” Ayer,

Emeritus Librarian, Ambrose University

When I first read *The Pursuit of God* as a green Bible college student, I was in over my head. Now decades later, when I read it again as a seasoned Christian leader, I was in over my heart. It has incited in me a deeper, heartfelt longing fused with a wider, acute understanding of what it means to cultivate intimacy with God and experience his manifest Presence. As editor of this Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic, Dr. Glen Scorgie is an astute guide who interprets and applies Tozer for twenty-first-century readers. His introduction, Scripture updates, footnotes, end-of-chapter discussion questions (especially useful for small groups), and afterword will fuel your pursuit of God. Following Dr. Scorgie’s advice, I intend to practice recollection—reviewing what I read and inviting the Holy Spirit to incorporate it into my life. I highly recommend this classic!

~ Roger Helland, DMin,

Prayer Ambassador, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada,
Author of *Pursuing God’s Presence* and *The Devout Life*

A modern Christian classic, *The Pursuit of God* is a must-read for all who desire a deeper walk with Christ. Calling us to abandon the self-focused life, A. W. Tozer presents a spiritual pathway that runs counter to our culture’s emphasis on self. That path invites us to “follow hard after God” in order to experience his manifest presence and hear the voice of the One who ceaselessly seeks

“to speak himself out to his creation.” This new edition artfully updates the “thee” and “thou” language of the original work for contemporary readers, conveying Tozer’s message while losing none of its meaning and majesty. In doing so, Glen Scorgie offers a priceless gift to a new generation of Christians.

~ **Glenn E. Myers, PhD,**

Professor of Church History and Theological Studies, Crown College

Scorgie’s winsome and inviting re-presentation of Tozer’s *The Pursuit of God* will resonate with new generations of spiritual seekers who need what Tozer, a modern mystic, clearly and forcefully identified as what really matters—authentic meeting with, knowing, loving, and uniting with God. The reader will appreciate being introduced to Tozer as by a friend, learn about the context of Tozer’s words from a scholar’s framing and footnotes, and be helped to a fuller prayer life through the guidance of Tozer-inspired supplemental resources. Read and be caught up in desire for God!

~ **Rev. Douglas S. Hardy, PhD,**

Professor of Spiritual Formation, Nazarene Theological Seminary

For over twenty-five years, as a friend of Dr. Glen Scorgie, I have often heard him mention Tozer’s life and work. Whenever he speaks of Tozer, it is with profound admiration and appreciation. His infectious enthusiasm is hard to resist, making Glen’s insightful understanding of Tozer a compelling invitation to revisit his works. Many Tozer enthusiasts consider Glen the ideal guide to deepen their understanding of Tozer’s life message. Following in Tozer’s footsteps as a faithful servant of God, Scorgie encourages his students to approach God with clear minds, to love him, and to discover ultimate fulfillment by truly abiding in him. I highly recommend this newly edited version of *The Pursuit of God* for Christian leaders seeking profound spiritual nourishment and insightful guidance in their journey.

~ **Rev. Albert Lam, DMin,**

Senior Pastor, Chinese Bible Church of San Diego

The Pursuit of God

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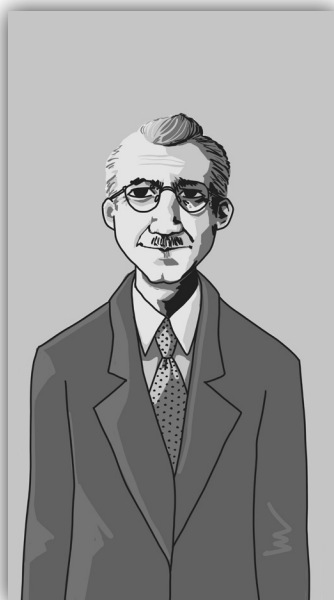
SACRED ROOTS SPIRITUAL CLASSICS



"Toward Ten Thousand Tozers"

The Pursuit of God

SACRED ROOTS SPIRITUAL CLASSICS 10



A. W. Tozer
edited by
Glen G. Scorgie



Table of Contents

<i>Publisher's Preface</i>	. . . . .	<i>xi</i>
<i>Editorial Notes</i>	. . . . .	<i>xv</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	. . . . .	<i>1</i>
<i>Chapter 1</i>		
<i>Following Hard after God.</i>	. . . . .	<i>17</i>
<i>Chapter 2</i>		
<i>The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing</i>	. . . . .	<i>33</i>
<i>Chapter 3</i>		
<i>Removing the Veil.</i>	. . . . .	<i>45</i>
<i>Chapter 4</i>		
<i>Apprehending God the Universal Presence</i>	. . . . .	<i>63</i>
<i>Chapter 5</i>		
<i>The Speaking Voice</i>	. . . . .	<i>87</i>
<i>Chapter 6</i>		
<i>The Gaze of the Soul</i>	. . . . .	<i>99</i>

<i>Chapter 7</i>	
<i>Restoring the Creator-Creature Relationship</i>	<i>115</i>
<i>Chapter 8</i>	
<i>Meekness and Rest in the Sacrament of Living</i>	<i>129</i>
<i>Afterword</i>	<i>149</i>
<i>Resources for Application</i>	<i>155</i>
<i>Soul Work and Soul Care:</i>	
<i>Contemplation and Spiritual Classics</i>	<i>157</i>
<i>Continuing the Conversation</i>	<i>179</i>
<i>Glossary</i>	<i>184</i>
<i>Map of Important Places</i>	<i>189</i>
<i>A Letter to God's Friends and Fellow Warriors</i>	
<i>On Why We Read the Sacred Roots</i>	
<i>Spiritual Classics Together.</i>	<i>190</i>
<i>The Nicene Creed with Scriptural Support.</i>	<i>206</i>
<i>From Before to Beyond Time:</i>	
<i>The Plan of God and Human History</i>	<i>210</i>
<i>About the Sacred Roots Project</i>	<i>213</i>
<i>Scripture Index</i>	<i>219</i>

*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord:
his going forth is prepared as the morning.*

~ Hosea 6:3, KJV

*To the memory of
James Taylor Scorgie (1926–2017)*



THEOLOGY & ETHICS



Publisher's Preface

Christian spiritual classics are non-canonical texts testified to across centuries and cultures as helpful for soul work and soul care. While spiritual classics are not on the same level as Scripture, they are *deep* and *wide* texts written by master practitioners in the way of Jesus. These texts have stood the test of time (*deep*), having been read by Christian leaders for many decades or even centuries. These classics have also been read with profit across many cultures (*wide*). When apprenticing themselves to these wise authors, Christian leaders across many generations and diverse cultures have found themselves helped with nurturing their own souls and caring for the souls of others.

Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics equip urban, rural, and incarcerated congregational leaders with the wealth of the Christian tradition. In partnership with The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI), each Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic is divided into eight chapters to correspond to TUMI's Capstone Curriculum modules (www.tumi.org). Additionally, each Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic is assigned a specific subject

area within TUMI's Capstone Curriculum: Biblical Studies (red cover), Theology and Ethics (blue cover), Christian Ministry (orange cover), or Global Mission (purple cover). For a more detailed description, see the appendix "A Letter to God's Friends and Fellow Warriors on Why We Read the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics Together."

Every Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic is edited by a scholar who has engaged it both academically and devotionally. The editor provides an introduction as well as chapter summaries. Each chapter consists of the actual text of the spiritual classic written by its author, not the editor, and concludes with five discussion questions to help you discuss the text with spiritual friends. Following chapters 1–8 is a summary afterword from the editor. Every classic also includes a "Continuing the Conversation" appendix with suggested resources, including other books written by the author, biographies, and more.

In chapters 1–8, the editor has either updated the old English to more contemporary English or provided a new translation. Additionally, the editor has added footnotes to define difficult or key vocabulary. The editor has also updated direct Scripture quotations to (usually) the English Standard Version, added Scripture references, and added italicized Scripture references to paraphrases of Scripture.

Before reading a Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic, we recommend you read both the classic's introduction and its "Soul Work and Soul Care" appendix. The latter offers practical suggestions for how to begin applying lessons from the spiritual classic into your life and ministry. Because many of the practices introduced in the spiritual classics may be new to readers, it can help to first understand

some of the potential payoffs for investing in reading the spiritual classic before you begin.

Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are available as paperbacks, hardbacks, e-books, and audiobooks. Additional resources for study and group discussion for each classic are available at www.sacredrootsministry.org.



THEOLOGY & ETHICS



Editorial Notes

While every effort has been made to retain Tozer's original meanings and pungent, lyrical style, the text of *The Pursuit of God* has been revised at points to make it more accessible to twenty-first-century readers. For example, the capitalization of words has been minimized, except for terms referring to God, and out-of-date words like *thee* and *thou* have been excised. Tozer's scriptural quotations and personal phrasings echoed the older wording of the King James Version of the Bible (1611). We judged it better to convey these in the more updated language of the New King James Version (1982). Some exceptions have been made when the true sense of the biblical text is more clearly conveyed by an alternate English translation.

The Pursuit of God contains an abundance of quotations from Scripture. Tozer provided references for some of these, but not all of them. As an aid to the reader, we have inserted references to all direct biblical quotations.

In places, Tozer quotes from earlier English translations of certain classic spiritual writings. When newer, improved editions of these classics are available, the quotations are made from them instead.

Finally, we have also taken the liberty, if and when appropriate, of making Tozer's text more unambiguously gender-accurate and gender-inclusive. For example, the old conventional term *man* has been replaced by *humanity* or *humankind* when men and women alike are in view. However, male figures continue to be described using exclusively male pronouns. This edition closely follows the original 1948 text. The two main exceptions are the exclusion of the original two-page foreword by Samuel Zwemer and a brief section deleted from the final chapter. The footnotes were created by the editor, not Tozer himself.



Introduction

It was Sunday night in downtown Toronto many years ago. The preacher with a narrow mustache moved to the pulpit. He first flexed his bony shoulders, as always, and then started in. Down below I was stretched out on a hard, creaky pew between my mom and dad, and slept right through the sermon. As it turned out, that may have been the last time the mystic A. W. Tozer ever preached. He passed away shortly after that.

Later on, I got to see his private upstairs study in his narrow little house, where he used to lie face down on the floor to pray, and place his nose on a handkerchief to protect his lungs from rug dust. I treasure the memory of a man who once lent me a big picture book of birds—cardinals in bold red, exquisite little bluebirds, Baltimore orioles flaunting their orange and black to the glory of God, and stunning yellow goldfinches—an extravagance of color, and a fascination the great man and a little boy happened to share. But ever since that night when I may have slept



through Tozer's last sermon, I have felt a sympathetic kinship to Eutychus (Acts 20:9).¹

It was a gift of providence that A. W. Tozer entered the life of our family many decades ago. My dad had been a pastor on the verge of burnout and spiritual exhaustion. Tozer pointed out a new pathway forward, and directed him toward the real supernatural presence and resources necessary to sustain a vibrant ministry. The timeworn old clichés were not enough. But Tozer marched to the beat of a different drummer, and we have all been changed for the better through his influence. I believe the same is possible for any and all who study this little book, which he so aptly titled *The Pursuit of God*.

Tozer the Author

A fire broke out on the Tozer family farm near Newburg in rural western Pennsylvania. It spread quickly, and in the chaos that ensued the entire farmhouse burned to the ground. The tragedy marked a pivotal point in the family's history. Before long, for this and other reasons, the farm had to be abandoned. The family packed up and moved further west to Akron, Ohio. There some of them found employment in a Goodyear rubber factory.

A. W. Tozer (1897–1963), a son born on that farm, was just ten years old at the time of the fire. We can only speculate that the event left a permanent impression on his heart and mind. Throughout his later life, he instinctively viewed the things of this world as passing and impermanent. And

1 Adapted from Glen G. Scorgie, *A Little Guide to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 9.

in their place, he turned his gaze upward to what was enduring and eternal.

Tozer was converted to Christ as a teenage factory worker in 1915. He soon joined the Christian and Missionary Alliance, a Holiness denomination that became his lifelong church home. Near the end of World War I, he served for a brief stint in the United States Army. Early on in his Christian life, he had sensed a call to pastoral ministry. In 1919, despite a lack of theological training, he accepted his first pastoral appointment: a little congregation in Stonewood, West Virginia, near Nutter Fort. Other pastorates followed in Morgantown, West Virginia, and then in Indianapolis. These led him eventually to Chicago's South Side (1928–1959), and finally to Toronto, Canada (1959–1963). He lived his entire life in this central region of North America, never residing more than six hundred miles from his rural birthplace.

A. W. Tozer had only limited formal education. In fact, he quit school altogether at age fifteen to help his financially struggling family.² But he was gifted intellectually, and he developed these gifts through a lifetime of diligent reading and self-directed study. He never celebrated ignorance or disdained wisdom and expertise as ways of saving face. Years later, he would advise young people: “Get all the education you can—then forget you have it, and let God use you.”³

2 Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 15.

3 My late father James Taylor Scorgie, “Personal Memoir of A. W. Tozer” (unpublished paper, 2007).

Temperamentally, he was reclusive, reflective and poetic. He was especially drawn to the writings of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Christian mystics and seventeenth-century Quietists⁴ like François Fénelon and Madame Guyon. He recognized them as kindred spirits and soul friends. With their help, he came to discover the exquisite experience of beholding God's beauty with adoration and delight.

Some of these spiritual writers were already known in his Holiness church tradition, but he discovered the majority of them on his own while browsing used book stores. He absorbed their visions, and then, with a uniquely engaging style, passed along his discoveries to others. He spoke reprovingly to a conservative Protestant community that had become, in his judgment, largely disconnected from the presence of God. His legacy was to reconnect such conservative evangelicals with larger, ecumenical streams of Christian spirituality, and to prod Bible-centered Christians to pursue the God who dwells "beyond the sacred page."⁵

A Modern Spiritual Classic

In 1959, someone asked Tozer to recommend some spiritual classics. He responded with a list of thirty-five.⁶ The inquirer then posed a follow-up question: "What

4 Quietism – A stream of Christian spirituality which emphasizes being still, passive, and quiet before God in order to allow God to take the lead and direct every aspect of one's life.

5 Glen G. Scorgie, "Tozer, A(iden) W(ilson) (1897–1963)," in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 805.

6 The list has been preserved in David J. Fant, Jr., *A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth Century Prophet* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1964), 181. The full list is included in the "Soul Work and Soul Care" appendix.

books since 1900 are likely to become classics?” Tozer replied, “If I might venture a pure guess, the answer would be—None.”⁷ At the time, neither he nor his inquirer were aware that a legitimate candidate for modern spiritual classic was emerging right in front of them: Tozer’s own *The Pursuit of God*, published just eleven years earlier.

A story circulates about how this little book came to be. If the account is reliable, the writing started in earnest one evening as Tozer embarked on an all-night train ride from Chicago down to Texas. A burst of creative energy (aided by a little tea and toast) sustained him in his compartment the whole night through. By morning, as the train pulled into the station, the book was basically complete.⁸

Tozer was a prolific spiritual writer, and later in this volume we offer recommendations for further reading of his works.⁹ But *The Pursuit of God* is a natural gateway to the rest of his writings. The little volume breathes a holy discontent with the merely formal and superficial aspects of organized Christianity. In their place, it offers hope of actually beholding and delighting in God in all his glory. It tantalizes readers with the possibility of replacing external religiosity with direct encounter with the wondrous presence of God.

Tozer’s aim was to win over readers’ hearts to the core truth that only God himself can fully satisfy our deepest soul longings. It was certainly so for Tozer himself. His goal in

7 A. W. Tozer to William Petersen, December 14, 1959, Ambrose University Library Archives. In fairness, Tozer’s list did include one twentieth century work: Thomas Kelly’s *A Testament of Devotion* (1941).

8 Dorsett, *A Passion for God*, 120.

9 See “Continuing the Conversation.”

life, and the one he commended to others, was the quiet, adoring contemplation of God's magnificent splendor. This was the experience that evoked his reverence and stimulated the transformation of his gazing soul. It remains a great mystery how in such moments *God comes to us* in clear and self-authenticating ways. The Christian's adoring gaze prepares a place of meeting, of real encounter. Tozer believed that we were made for this, and that the pursuit of God is therefore our highest purpose, and the secret to our fulfillment.

Did this make Tozer a mystic? Well, this depends, of course, on how the term is defined. If a mystic means someone who disdains our God-given reason, or who exalts private subjective experience over the truths revealed in Holy Scripture, Tozer was *not* one. We know that he loved the Bible. He immersed himself in its pages. Words, phrases, and stories from the Scriptures flooded his mind at every turn.

However, if a mystic is understood in the classic Christian sense as someone who seeks, and enjoys above all else, the real presence of God in their lives, then Tozer definitely *was* a mystic. And as he elsewhere explained, any Christian who claims a personal relationship with Jesus Christ must already be at least a bit of a mystic.¹⁰ The only remaining question is how much we will choose to lean into this incredible privilege and possibility.

It is natural and normal for readers to ask: What is such an experience of God actually like? Here, like so many other Christian mystics, Tozer declined to offer much detail. He insisted that such encounters cannot adequately be

10 A. W. Tozer, introduction to *The Christian Book of Mystical Verse*, ed. A. W. Tozer (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1963), vi.

described secondhand. You have to experience them for yourself. The best he could do was point you in the right direction.¹¹ Nevertheless, *The Pursuit of God* contains a hint or two. Repeatedly, Tozer mentions the “sweetness,” and even the “piercing sweetness,” of the believer’s experience of the love of Christ.¹² Those who have walked closely with God will certainly have some sense of what he was talking about.

Tozer never offered any slick three-, five-, or seven-step program for achieving this spiritual goal. In his mind, there should be no rigid templates or detailed manuals for pursuing God. He believed that “if our hearts keep right,” such things will more or less take care of themselves. Instead, the pivotal issue for him was always the intensity of the seeking Christian’s longing for God. The Christian’s level of desire is the thing upon which everything else turns. And so, Tozer’s personal mission was to inspire and deepen such holy longing in others, and to point them toward the one true source of soul satisfaction.

The Pursuit of God focuses primarily on identifying and meeting the *preconditions* for such satisfying encounter with God. For starters, Tozer explains that it requires an ardent pursuit of God, for he does not give himself to the

11 Tozer once wrote: “The soul’s relation to the Holy Spirit is so highly personal that no third party can understand. The best one can do is to point an inquirer to the Lamb of God and then fade out of the picture. The leap of faith must be made by the seeker, and having made it he can scarcely tell another how he did it.” A. W. Tozer to Catherine Marshall LeSourd, January 25, 1961, Ambrose University Archives.

12 Tozer’s *The Christian Book of Mystical Verse* (1963) harnesses the poetic descriptors of other mystics to try to convey something of the experience of encounter with God. Typically, Tozer preferred to cite the language of other mystics rather than substitute his own, or attempt to articulate such experiences in his own words.

casual seeker. It also requires a corresponding detachment for all other less worthy and distracting affections. Tozer reinforces this point by using the difficult, bracing, yet thoroughly biblical imagery of *dying* to self-love and self-interest. The price may be high, but the prize is worth it.

One thing, he believed, is certain: such a pursuit requires a hard shift in the orientation of every soul. It involves refocusing away from oneself and toward God in self-forgetful adoration. Here Tozer takes up his pen to attempt the impossible—to lay out the attributes of God that ought to evoke “a burning adoration” and delight in him. But his effort here is far too brief, and I suspect Tozer knew it. Later on in life, he would describe the God he had come to adore in considerably more detail. In *The Knowledge of the Holy* (1961), he was able to evoke a compelling vision of God with much greater success.

Still, Tozer realized that we dare not settle for God being a mere logical inference from evidence. That kind of religion is seriously deficient, and can never sustain us for very long. One of the great deceptions of Tozer’s time, and ours, is the notion that God is far off and detached from our reality—basically hidden and virtually inaccessible. Tozer counters such a distorted view of reality by reminding us that God is always and everywhere fully present, and closer to us than our own breath. Moreover, he is not a god who prefers his own privacy, but is constantly reaching out to us in loving efforts to communicate. God continues to speak in the here and now, so that it will be to our great advantage to learn the long-forgotten disciplines of becoming still, of listening, and eventually hearing his voice with unmistakable clarity.

In some ways, the concluding sections of *The Pursuit of God* are among the most powerful. There we learn that faith is the continuous gaze of the soul upon a saving God. Such inward beholding looks *out* instead of *in*, and by this means Christians are able to escape their chronic self-centeredness. Among other things, such a reorientation dramatically alters Christians' motivation. Tozer depicts this newer posture in life as *meekness*—that is, as one characterized by a restful soul no longer driven by personal ambition or a need to impress others. When we get this right, we will care less about “what people think of us as long as God is pleased.”

A criticism often registered against those who intently pursue God is that they become so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good. This should not, and need not, be so. Tozer reminds us that the ordinary moments and mundane tasks of our lives are never to be treated as wastes of time. The pursuit of God does not permit us to dismiss such duties as unimportant, for there is a sacred quality to the everyday aspects of life. We were created as earthlings; this world is precisely where our spiritual service is to be rendered. This is where we have been called to commune with God and to be pleasing to him.

The Significance of the Work

A defining feature of a spiritual classic is that it will have a long shelf-life of usefulness. *The Pursuit of God* certainly qualifies. Since its publication in 1948, it has been enormously influential, especially within conservative evangelical and Fundamentalist circles.¹³ One good reason

13 Well over a million copies have been published through the years. In 2000, it made *Christianity Today* magazine's list of the top one hundred books of the

for this is that its author belonged to these same circles. With his wife, he raised a family on a tight budget. He rode the bus. He even followed the fortunes of the Chicago Cubs baseball team. He was different from ancient spiritual writers who lived in faraway places. In so many ways, he was one of us.

The Christian faith involves *believing* that certain things are true. It also involves *behaving* in certain ways that are good. But *The Pursuit of God* reminds us that there is more to the Christian faith than just believing and behaving, essential as both of these are. There must also be a *relational* dimension, an aspect of real meeting—of actual encounter—with the living God. Indeed, such genuine connection to God is the sustaining supply line for any enduring faith and life of service.

To underscore this point, Tozer quoted the great evangelist John Wesley: “Orthodoxy, or right opinion, is, at best, a very slender part of religion.”¹⁴ This comment has been taken by some people to mean that our beliefs are relatively unimportant when it comes to the spiritual life. Nothing could be further from the truth. The martyrs of the Christian faith died for their convictions, not their feelings, and the early church left us noble declarations of beliefs. This statement of Wesley, which Tozer quotes, should be understood to mean that mere mental assent to doctrines is insufficient to sustain a living faith.¹⁵

twentieth century.

14 John Wesley, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1749), 4.

15 “To believe on Christ savingly means to believe the right things about Christ. There is no escaping this.” A. W. Tozer, “How Important Is Creed?,” *The Alliance Witness*, August 8, 1962, 2.

What is the goal of this Christian mystical way? What is it that mystics like Tozer sought? The answer is *genuine meeting* with God, and more than that—meeting that matures into a mysterious oneness with God, made possible by Christ through his Spirit. If we probe further, we will see that such “mystic, sweet communion” moves in two directions—from God to us, and us back to God. It becomes a reciprocating dance of mutual delight. As Augustine famously observed, we were made for this. It is a foretaste of our future heavenly participation in the life of the Trinity itself. The wonder is that glimmers or foretastes of such a future can be experienced right here and now. That is the joyful testimony of Tozer and indeed of all the Christian mystics.

It is easy to criticize books for what they fail to mention. We can readily acknowledge that *The Pursuit of God* is thin on practical strategies for cultivating a closer walk with God. It does not cover the spiritual disciplines, for example, or address our need for supportive community in order to grow, or explain how to deal with those dark nights of the soul when God seems absent from us in our loneliness or suffering. We could go on, but the point should be clear. Discerning readers will receive Tozer’s wisdom with gratitude, but not treat *The Pursuit of God* as the last word on Christian spirituality or in any sense sufficient by itself. It was never meant to serve as more than a simple pointer to the wider resources and greater riches of the Christian spiritual tradition.

Some authors do not so much deliver information as stir up *holy envy* in their readers. Envy makes us want what others have. Holy envy is a good kind of envy. The intent of writers like Tozer is less to explain everything to

us, and more to light a fire of desire for what they have experienced, and what might be possible for us as well. A. W. Tozer's final exhortation would surely be: Press on to experience for yourself that to which the Christian mystics have given consistently winsome testimony. Make such lived experience of our loving, magnificent God your own. When all is said and done, here with him you will find your true and enduring home.



THEOLOGY & ETHICS

The Text





THEOLOGY & ETHICS



Chapter 1

Following Hard after God

The Christian's greatest privilege and highest purpose in life is to experience ever-deepening intimacy with God. The essential prerequisite on our part is an insatiable, heartfelt longing after God. This should be the natural desire of every truly regenerated believer. But we must guard ourselves against a kind of religious busyness that allows little time for the actual pursuit of God.

Preface

In this hour of all-but-universal darkness one cheering gleam appears: within the fold of orthodox Christianity there are to be found increasing numbers of persons whose religious lives are marked by a growing hunger after God himself. They are eager for spiritual realities and will not be put off with words, nor will they be content with correct "interpretations" of truth. They are thirsty for God, and

they will not be satisfied till they have drunk deep at the fountain of living water.

This is the only real promise of revival which I have been able to detect anywhere on the religious horizon. It may be the cloud the size of a man's hand for which a few saints here and there have been looking. It can result in a resurrection of life for many souls and a recapture of that radiant wonder which should accompany faith in Christ, that wonder which has all but fled the church of God in our day.

But this hunger must be recognized by our religious leaders. Current evangelicalism has (to change the figure) laid the altar and divided the sacrifice into parts, but now seems satisfied to count the stones and rearrange the pieces with never a care that there is not a sign of fire upon the top of lofty Carmel (1 Kgs 18). But God be thanked that there are a few who care. They are those who, while they love the altar and delight in the sacrifice, are yet unable to reconcile themselves to the continued absence of fire. They desire God above all. They are hungry to taste for themselves the "piercing sweetness" of the love of Christ about whom all the holy prophets did write and the psalmists did sing.

There is today no lack of Bible teachers to set forth correctly the principles of the doctrines of Christ, but too many of these seem satisfied to teach the fundamentals of the faith year after year, strangely unaware that there is in their ministry no manifest Presence, nor anything unusual in their personal lives. They minister constantly to believers who feel within their hearts a longing which their teaching simply does not satisfy.

I trust I speak in charity, but the lack in our pulpits is real. Milton's¹ terrifying sentence applies to our day as accurately as it did to his: "The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed."² It is a solemn thing, and no small scandal in the kingdom, to see God's children starving while actually seated at the Father's table. The truth of Wesley's words is established before our eyes: "Orthodoxy, or right opinion, is, at best, a very slender part of religion."³ "Though right tempers⁴ cannot subsist without right opinions, yet right opinions may subsist without right tempers. There may be a right opinion of God without either love or one right temper toward him. Satan is a proof of this."⁵

Thanks to our splendid Bible societies and to other effective agencies for the spread of the word, there are today many millions of people who hold "right opinions," probably more than ever before in the history of the church. Yet I wonder if there was ever a time when true spiritual worship was at a lower ebb. To great sections of the church the art of worship has been lost entirely, and in its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the "program." This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us.

1 John Milton (1608–1674) – The great English Puritan poet whose epic poems *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671) were thoroughly baptized in biblical imagery and themes.

2 John Milton, "Lycidas" (1638), verse 8.

3 Wesley, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, 4.

4 Tempers – Temperaments or dispositions.

5 John Wesley, "Some Remarks on 'A Defense of the Preface to the Edinburgh Edition of *Aspasio Vindicated*,'" in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, 3rd ed. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1978), 347.

Sound Bible exposition is an imperative *must* in the church of the living God. Without it no church can be a New Testament church in any strict meaning of that term. But exposition may be carried on in such way as to leave the hearers devoid of any true spiritual nourishment whatever. For it is not mere words that nourish the soul, but God himself, and unless and until the hearers find God in their personal experience, they are not the better for having heard the truth. The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring people to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into him, that they may delight in his presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God himself in the core and center of their hearts.

This book is a modest attempt to aid God's hungry children so to find him. Nothing here is new except in the sense that it is a discovery which my own heart has made of spiritual realities most delightful and wonderful to me. Others before me have gone much farther into these holy mysteries than I have done, but if my fire is not large it is yet real, and there may be those who can light their candle at its flame.

Following Hard after God

*My soul follows hard after you: your right
hand upholds me. ~ Psalm 63:8, KJV*

Christian theology teaches the doctrine of prevenient grace,⁶ which briefly stated means this, that before a person can seek God, God must first have sought the person. Before a

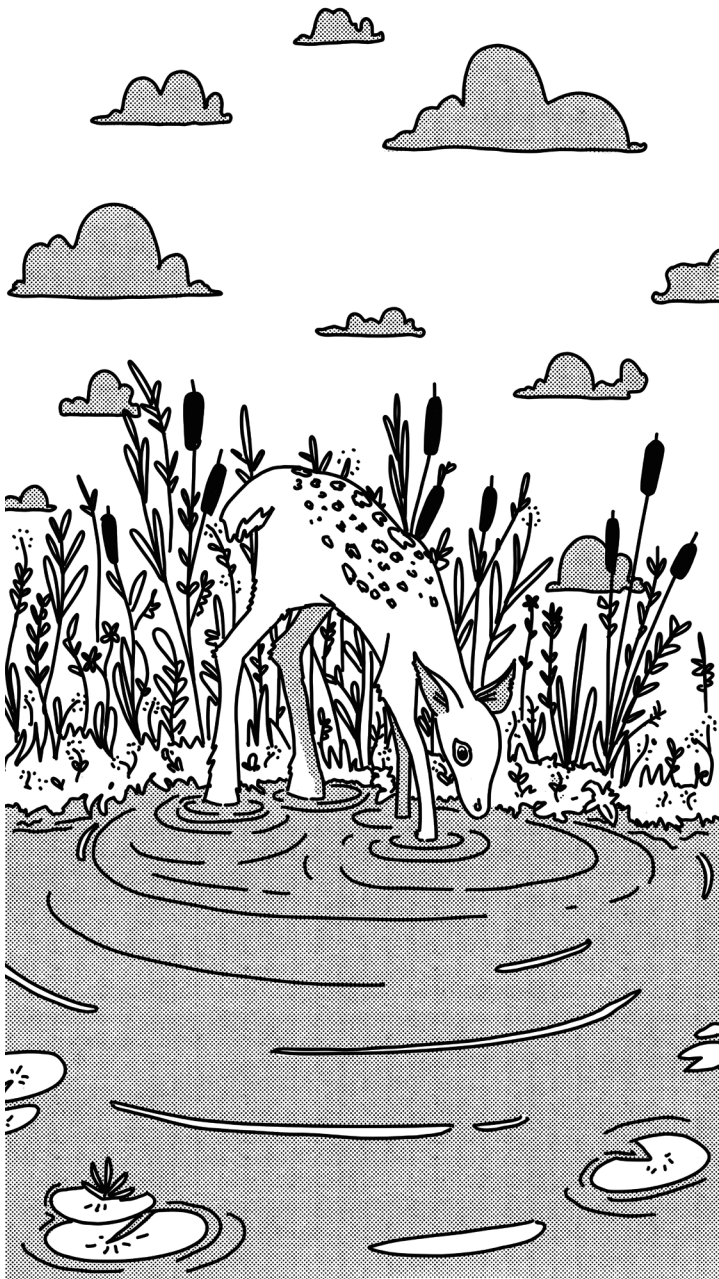
6 Prevenient Grace – A Christian doctrine which has been especially popularized in the past three centuries by John Wesley and his followers.

sinful person can think a right thought of God, there must have been a work of enlightenment done within them; imperfect it may be, but a true work nonetheless, and the secret cause of all desiring and seeking and praying which may follow.

We pursue God because, and only because, he has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit. “No one can come to Me,” said our Lord, “unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44), and it is by this very prevenient *drawing* that God takes from us every vestige of credit for the act of coming. The impulse to pursue God originates with God, but the outworking of that impulse is our following hard after him; and all the time we are pursuing him we are already in his hand: “Your right hand upholds me” (Ps 63:8).

In this divine “upholding” and human “following” there is no contradiction. All is of God, for as von Hügel⁷ teaches, *God is always previous*. In practice, however, (that is, where God’s previous working meets a person’s present response) the person must pursue God. On our part there must be positive reciprocation if this secret drawing of God is to result in identifiable experience of the Divine. In the warm language of personal feeling this is stated in Psalm 42: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps 42:1–2). This is deep calling unto deep, and the longing heart will understand it.

7 Friedrich von Hügel (1852–1925) – Son of an Austrian diplomat and lifelong resident of Great Britain, Baron von Hügel was a widely-read, and occasionally controversial, guide for many on Christian mystical experience.



The doctrine of justification by faith—a biblical truth, and a blessed relief from sterile legalism and unavailing self-effort—has in our time fallen into evil company and been interpreted by many in such manner as actually to bar people from the knowledge of God. The whole transaction of religious conversion has been made mechanical and spiritless. Faith may now be exercised without a jar to the moral life and without embarrassment to the Adamic ego. Christ may be “received” without creating any special love for him in the soul of the receiver. The person is “saved,” but he or she is not hungry nor thirsty after God. In fact, they are specifically taught to be satisfied and encouraged to be content with little.

*The modern scientist has lost God amid the wonders
of his world; we Christians are in real danger of losing
God amid the wonders of his word.*

The modern scientist has lost God amid the wonders of his world; we Christians are in real danger of losing God amid the wonders of his word. We have almost forgotten that God is a person and, as such, can be cultivated as any person can. It is inherent in personality to be able to know other personalities, but full knowledge of one personality by another cannot be achieved in one encounter. It is only after long and loving mental interaction that the full possibilities of both can be explored.

All social interaction between human beings is a response of personality to personality, grading upward from the most casual brush between one person and another to the fullest, most intimate communion of which the human soul is capable. Religion, so far as it is genuine,

is in essence the response of created personalities to the creating personality, God. "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3).

God is a person, and in the deep of his mighty nature he thinks, wills, enjoys, feels, loves, desires and suffers as any other person may. In making himself known to us he stays by the familiar pattern of personality. He communicates with us through the avenues of our minds, our wills, and our emotions. The continuous and unembarrassed interchange of love and thought between God and the soul of the redeemed human being is the throbbing heart of New Testament religion.

This interaction between God and the soul is known to us in conscious personal awareness. It is personal: that is, it does not come through the body of believers, as such, but is known to the individual, and to the body through the individuals which compose it. And it is conscious: that is, it does not stay below the threshold of consciousness and work there unknown to the soul (as, for instance, infant baptism is thought by some to do), but comes within the field of awareness where the individual can "know" it as they know any other fact of experience.

You and I are in little (our sins excepted) what God is in large. Being made in his image we have within us the capacity to know him. In our sins we lack only the power. The moment the Spirit has revived us to life in regeneration our whole being senses its kinship to God and leaps up in joyous recognition. That is the heavenly birth without which we cannot see the kingdom of God. It is, however, not an end but an inception, for now begins

the glorious pursuit, the heart's happy exploration of the infinite riches of the Godhead.⁸ That is where we begin, I say, but where we stop no human has yet discovered, for there is in the awesome and mysterious depths of the Triune God neither limit nor end.

Shoreless ocean, who can sound thee?
Thine own eternity is round thee,
Majesty divine!⁹

To have found God and still to pursue him is the soul's paradox of love, scorned indeed by the too-easily-satisfied religionist, but justified in happy experience by the children of the burning heart. Bernard of Clairvaux stated this holy paradox in a musical quatrain¹⁰ that will be instantly understood by every worshiping soul:

We taste thee, O thou living bread,
And long to feast upon thee still:
We drink of thee, the fountainhead
And thirst our souls from thee to fill.¹¹

*Come near to the holy men and women of the past
and you will soon feel the heat of their desire after God.*

Come near to the holy men and women of the past and you will soon feel the heat of their desire after God. They mourned for him, they prayed and wrestled and sought

8 Godhead – The Trinity in unity.

9 Hymn by Frederick Faber, "Majesty Divine!" (1862), verse 1.

10 Quatrain – Poetic form with four lines.

11 Hymn by Bernard of Clairvaux, "Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts" (c. 1150), translated by Ray Palmer (1808–1887).

for him day and night, in season and out, and when they had found him, the finding was all the sweeter for the long seeking. Moses used the fact that he knew God as an argument for knowing him better. “Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight”; and from there he rose to make the daring request, “Please, show me Your glory” (Exod 33:13, 18). God was frankly pleased by this display of ardor, and the next day called Moses into the mount, and there in solemn procession made all his glory pass before him.

David’s life was a torrent of spiritual desire, and his psalms ring with the cry of the seeker and the glad shout of the finder. Paul confessed the mainspring of his life to be his burning desire after Christ. “That I may know Him,” was the goal of his heart, and to this he sacrificed everything. “Indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Phil 3:8, 10).

Hymnody is sweet with the longing after God, the God whom, while the singer seeks, he knows he has already found. “His track I see and I’ll pursue,” sang our fathers and mothers only a short generation ago, but that song is heard no more when believers assemble.¹² How tragic that we in this dark day have had our seeking done for us by our teachers. Everything is made to center upon the initial act of “accepting” Christ (a term, incidentally, which is not found in the Bible) and we are not expected thereafter to crave any further revelation of God to our

12 Hymn by John Cennick, “Jesus, My All, to Heaven Is Gone” (1743).

souls. We have been snared in the coils of a false logic which insists that if we have found him, we need no more to seek him. This is set before us as the last word in orthodoxy, and it is taken for granted that no Bible-taught Christian ever believed otherwise. Thus, the whole testimony of the worshiping, seeking, singing church on that subject is crisply set aside. The experiential heart-theology of a grand army of fragrant saints is rejected in favor of a smug interpretation of Scripture which would certainly have sounded strange to an Augustine, a Rutherford¹³ or a Brainerd.¹⁴

In the midst of this great chill there are some, I rejoice to acknowledge, who will not be content with shallow logic. They will admit the force of the argument, and then turn away with tears to hunt some lonely place and pray, “Please, show me Your glory” (Exod 33:18). They want to taste, to touch with their hearts, to see with their inner eyes the wonder that is God.

I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God. The lack of it has brought us to our present low estate. The stiff and wooden quality about our religious lives is a result of our lack of holy desire. Casual indifference is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth. Acute desire must be present or there will be no manifestation of Christ to his people. He waits to be wanted. Too bad that with many of us he waits so long, so very long, in vain.

Every age has its own characteristics. Right now, we are in an age of religious complexity. The simplicity which is in

13 Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) – A Scottish Puritan.

14 David Brainerd (1718–1747) – Colonial Puritan missionary to the native peoples of America.

Christ is rarely found among us. In its stead are programs, methods, organizations and a world of nervous activities which occupy time and attention but can never satisfy the longing of the heart. The shallowness of our inner experience, the hollowness of our worship, and that servile¹⁵ imitation of the world which marks our promotional methods all testify that we, in this day, know God only imperfectly, and the peace of God scarcely at all.

If we would find God amid all the religious externals, we must first determine to find him, and then proceed in the way of simplicity. Now as always God reveals himself to “little children” (Luke 10:21) and hides himself in thick darkness from the wise and the prudent. We must simplify our approach to him. We must strip down to essentials (and they will be found to be blessedly few). We must put away all effort to impress, and come with the transparent honesty of childhood. If we do this, without doubt God will quickly respond.

When religion has said its last word, there is little that we need other than God himself. The evil habit of seeking *God-and* effectively prevents us from finding God in full revelation. In the “and” lies our great woe. If we omit the “and” we shall soon find God, and in him we shall find that for which we have all our lives been secretly longing.

We need not fear that in seeking God only we may narrow our lives or restrict the motions of our expanding hearts. The opposite is true. We can well afford to make God our All, to concentrate, to sacrifice the many for the One. The author of the quaint old English classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, teaches us how to do this.

15 Servile – Groveling.

Lift up your heart to God with a humble impulse of love; and have himself as your aim, not any of his goods.¹⁶ Take care that you avoid thinking of anything but God himself, so that there is nothing for your reason or your will to work on, except God himself. . . . This is the work of the soul that pleases God most.¹⁷

Again, he recommends that in prayer we practice a further stripping down of everything, even of our theology. “For a simple reaching out directly towards God is sufficient, without any other [objective] except himself.” Yet underneath all his thinking lay the broad foundation of New Testament truth, for he explains that by *himself* he means “the God who made you and ransomed you, and has in his grace called you to this [endeavor].”¹⁸ And he is all for simplicity: If we would have religion “wrapped up and enfolded in a single word, so as to have a better grasp of it, take just a little word, of one syllable rather than two, for the shorter it is the [more] it is in agreement with this exercise of the spirit. Such a one is the word *God* or the word *love*.”¹⁹

When the Lord divided Canaan among the tribes of Israel, Levi received no share of the land. God said to him simply, “I am your portion and your inheritance” (Num 18:20), and by those words made him richer than all his brothers,

16 Goods – His gifts, benefits, and blessings.

17 *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. James Walsh, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1981), 119–20.

18 *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 133.

19 *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 133–34.

richer than all the kings and rajas²⁰ who have ever lived in the world. And there is a spiritual principle here, a principle still valid for every priest of the Most High God.

Those who have God for their treasure have all things in One. Many ordinary treasures may be denied them, or if they are allowed to have them, the enjoyment of them will be so tempered that they will never be necessary to their happiness. Or if they must see them go, one after one, they will scarcely feel a sense of loss, for having the source of all things they have in One all satisfaction, all pleasure, all delight. Whatever they may lose they have actually lost nothing, for they now have it all in One, and they have it purely, legitimately and forever.

Prayer

O God, I have tasted your goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want you; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made even thirstier. Show me your glory, I pray, that so I may know you indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." Then give me grace to rise and follow you up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long. In Jesus's name, Amen.

20 Raja – Royal title similar to "king" or "prince" used in South and Southeast Asia.

Discussion Questions



Back in his day, Tozer detected a growing hunger for God amongst some Christians. Do you detect a similar interest in authentic Christian spirituality today? If so, can you give some examples?



What is lacking when a church only teaches biblical truths? What is it that many Christians are still hungering for?



What do you think is most required to make Christians shift from passive indifference to the pursuit of God toward a more intense commitment to it? What triggers such “holy desire”?



Tozer suggests that Christians in the 1940s were often so preoccupied with operating church programs that they had little time or energy left to devote to their relationship with God. Is this still true today? How might we create more space for God in our lives, while still fulfilling our duties to the church and to others?



In this chapter, Tozer calls for greater simplicity in our lives so that we can devote ourselves to the most important things without so many distractions. What could we afford to do less? How might we simplify our current way of “doing life”?



THEOLOGY & ETHICS



Chapter 2

The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing

There is a “possessive spirit” embedded deep within all of us. Too often we become excessively attached to the gifts God has showered upon us. These things can come to usurp God’s rightful place in our affections. Such a spirit of possessiveness must be relinquished before God can bless us fully with his presence. Holding our possessions lightly, and embracing simplicity, is a lifelong discipline with great rewards.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ~ Matthew 5:3, KJV

Before the Lord God made humans upon the earth, he first prepared for them by creating a world of useful and pleasant things for their sustenance and delight. In the Genesis account of the creation these are called simply

“things.” They were made for humanity’s uses, but they were meant always to be external to humans and subservient to them. In the deep heart of humans was a shrine where none but God was worthy to come. Within them was God; without, a thousand gifts which God had showered upon them.

But sin has introduced complications and has made those very gifts of God a potential source of ruin to the soul.

Our woes began when God was forced out of his central shrine and “things” were allowed to enter. Within the human heart “things” have taken over. People have now by nature no peace within their hearts, for God is crowned there no longer, but there in the moral dusk stubborn and aggressive usurpers¹ fight among themselves for first place on the throne.

This is not a mere metaphor, but an accurate analysis of our real spiritual trouble. There is within the human heart a tough fibrous root of fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. It covets “things” with a deep and fierce passion. The pronouns “my” and “mine” look innocent enough in print, but their constant and universal use is significant. They express the real nature of the old Adamic man better than a thousand volumes of theology could do. They are verbal symptoms of our deep disease. The roots of our hearts have grown down into *things*, and we dare not pull up one rootlet lest we die. Things have become necessary to us, a development never originally intended. God’s gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitution.

1 Usurpers – Those intent on unseating rightful authorities and taking over for themselves.

Our Lord referred to this tyranny of *things* when he said to his disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matt 16:24–25).

Breaking this truth into fragments for our better understanding, it would seem that there is within each of us an enemy which we tolerate at our peril. Jesus called it “life” and “self,” or as we would say, the *self-life*. Its chief characteristic is its possessiveness: the words “gain” and “profit” suggest this. To allow this enemy to live is in the end to lose everything. To reject it and give up all for Christ’s sake is to lose nothing at last, but to preserve everything unto life eternal. And possibly also a hint is given here as to the only effective way to destroy this foe: it is by the cross. “Let him . . . take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt 16:24).

The way to deeper knowledge of God is through the lonely valleys of soul poverty and humble surrender of all things. The blessed ones who possess the kingdom are they who have rejected and renounced every external thing and have rooted from their hearts all sense of possessing. These are the “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3). They have reached an inward state paralleling the outward circumstances of the common beggar in the streets of Jerusalem; that is what the word “poor” as Christ used it actually means. These blessed poor are no longer slaves to the tyranny of *things*. They have broken the yoke of the oppressor; and this they have done not by fighting but by surrendering. Though free from all sense of possessing, they yet possess all things. “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3).

Let me exhort you to take this seriously. It is not to be understood as mere Bible teaching to be stored away in the mind along with an inert mass of other doctrines. It is a marker on the road to greener pastures, a path chiseled against the steep sides of the mount of God. We dare not try to bypass it if we would follow on in this holy pursuit. We must ascend a step at a time. If we refuse one step, we bring our progress to an end.

As is frequently true, this New Testament principle of spiritual life finds its best illustration in the Old Testament.

As is frequently true, this New Testament principle of spiritual life finds its best illustration in the Old Testament. In the story of Abraham and Isaac we have a dramatic picture of the surrendered life as well as an excellent commentary on the first Beatitude.

Abraham was old when Isaac was born, old enough indeed to have been his grandfather, and the child became at once the delight and idol of his heart. From that moment when he first stooped to take the tiny form awkwardly in his arms, he was an eager love slave of his son. God went out of his way to comment on the strength of this affection. And it is not hard to understand. The baby represented everything sacred to his father's heart: the promises of God, the covenants, the hopes of the years and the long messianic dream. As he watched him grow from babyhood to young manhood the heart of the old man was knit closer and closer with the life of his son, till at last the relationship bordered upon the perilous. It was then that God stepped in to save both father and son from the consequences of an uncleansed love.

“Take now your son,” said God to Abraham, “your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Gen 22:2). The sacred writer spares us a close-up of the agony that night on the slopes near Beersheba when the aged man had it out with his God, but respectful imagination may view in awe the bent form and convulsive wrestling alone under the stars. Possibly not again until a greater than Abraham wrestled in the Garden of Gethsemane did such mortal pain visit a human soul (Matt 26:36–46). If only the man himself might have been allowed to die. That would have been easier a thousand times, for he was old now, and to die would have been no great ordeal for one who had walked so long with God. Besides, it would have been a last sweet pleasure to let his dimming vision rest upon the figure of his steadfast son who would live to carry on the Abrahamic line and fulfill in himself the promises of God made long before in Ur of the Chaldeans.

How should he slay the lad! Even if he could get the consent of his wounded and protesting heart, how could he reconcile the act with the promise, “In Isaac your seed shall be called” (Gen 21:12)? This was Abraham’s trial by fire, and he did not fail in the crucible.² While the stars still shone like sharp white points above the tent where the sleeping Isaac lay, and long before the gray dawn had begun to lighten the east, the old saint had made up his mind. He would offer his son as God had directed him to do, and *then trust God to raise him from the dead* (Heb 11:19). This, says the writer to the Hebrews, was the solution his aching heart found sometime in the dark

2 Crucible – Metaphorically, a place or situation of trial with lasting consequences.

night, and he rose “early in the morning” to carry out the plan. It is beautiful to see that, while he erred as to God’s method, he had correctly sensed the secret of his great heart. And the solution accords well with the New Testament Scripture, “Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matt 16:25).

God let the suffering old man go through with it up to the point where he knew there would be no retreat, and then forbade him to lay a hand upon the boy. To the wondering patriarch³ he now says in effect, “It’s all right, Abraham. I never intended that you should actually slay the lad. I only wanted to remove him from the temple of your heart that I might reign unchallenged there. I wanted to correct the perversion that existed in your love. Now you may have the boy, sound and well. Take him and go back to your tent. Now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” Then heaven opened and a voice was heard saying to him, “By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (Gen 22:16–18).

The old man of God lifted his head to respond to the voice, and stood there on the mount strong and pure and grand, a man marked out by the Lord for special treatment, a friend and favorite of the Most High. Now he was a man

3 Patriarch – Male authority or prominent father figure.



wholly surrendered, a man utterly obedient, a man who possessed nothing. He had concentrated his all in the person of his dear son, and God had taken it from him. God could have begun out on the margin of Abraham's life and worked inward to the center; he chose rather to cut quickly to the heart and have it over in one sharp act of separation. In dealing this way, God was working quickly and efficiently. It hurt cruelly, but it was effective.

He had everything, but he possessed nothing. There is the spiritual secret. There is the sweet theology of the heart which can be learned only in the school of renunciation.

I have said that Abraham possessed nothing. Yet was not this poor man rich? Everything he had owned before was his still to enjoy: sheep, camels, herds, and goods of every sort. He had also his wife and his friends, and best of all he had his son Isaac safe by his side. He had everything, but he *possessed nothing*. There is the spiritual secret. There is the sweet theology of the heart which can be learned only in the school of renunciation.⁴ The books on systematic theology overlook this, but the wise will understand.

After that bitter and blessed experience, I think the words "my" and "mine" never had again the same meaning for Abraham. The sense of possession which they connote was gone from his heart. *Things* had been cast out forever. They had now become external to the man. His inner heart was free from them. The world said, "Abraham is rich," but the aged patriarch only smiled. He could not explain it to

4 Renunciation – The act of decisively relinquishing or giving away.

them, but he knew that he owned nothing, that his real treasures were inward and eternal.

There can be no doubt that this possessive clinging to things is one of the most harmful habits in life. Because it is so natural it is rarely recognized for the evil that it is; but its consequences are tragic.

We are often hindered from giving up our treasures to the Lord out of fear for their safety; this is especially true when those treasures are loved relatives and friends. But we need have no such fears. Our Lord came not to destroy but to save. Everything is safe which we commit to him, and nothing is really safe which is not so committed.

Our gifts and talents should also be turned over to him. They should be recognized for what they are, God's loan to us, and should never be considered in any sense our own. We have no more right to claim credit for special abilities than for blue eyes or strong muscles. "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7).

Christians who are alive enough to know themselves even slightly will recognize this unhealthy fixation on possessions, and will grieve to find them in their own hearts. If the longing after God is strong enough within them, they will want to do something about the matter. Now, what should they do?

First of all, they should put away all defense and make no attempt to excuse themselves either in their own eyes or before the Lord. Those who defend themselves will have themselves for their defense, and they will have no other; but let them come defenseless before the Lord and they

will have for their defender no less than God himself. Let the inquiring Christian trample under foot every slippery trick of their deceitful heart and insist upon frank and open relations with the Lord.

Then they should remember that this is holy business. No careless or casual dealings will suffice. Let them come to God in full determination to be heard. Let them insist that God accept their all, that he take *things* out of their heart and himself reign there in power. It may be that they will need to become specific, to name things and people by their names one by one. If they will become drastic enough, they can shorten the time of their travail from years to minutes and enter the good land long before their slower brothers and sisters who go easy on their feelings and insist upon caution in their dealings with God.

Let us never forget that such a truth as this cannot be learned by rote⁵ as one would learn the facts of physical science. They must be *experienced* before we can really know them. We must in our hearts live through Abraham's harsh and bitter experiences if we would know the blessedness which follows them. The ancient curse will not go out painlessly; the tough old miser within us will not lie down and die obedient to our command. He must be torn out of our heart like a plant from the soil; he must be extracted in agony and blood like a tooth from the jaw. He must be expelled from our soul by violence as Christ expelled the money changers from the temple. And we shall need to steel ourselves against his pitiful begging, and to recognize it as springing out of self-pity, one of the most blameworthy sins of the human heart.

5 Learn by rote – Memorize by repetition.

If we would indeed know God in growing intimacy, we must go this way of renunciation. And if we are set upon the pursuit of God he will sooner or later bring us to this test. Abraham's testing was, at the time, not known to him as such, yet if he had taken some course other than the one that he did, the whole history of the Old Testament would have been different. God would have found his man, no doubt, but the loss to Abraham would have been tragic beyond the telling. So, we will be brought one by one to the testing place, and we may never know when we are there. At that testing place there will be no dozen possible choices for us; just one and an alternative, but our whole future will be conditioned by the choice we make.

Prayer

Father, I want to know you, but my coward heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from you the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that you may enter and dwell there without a rival. Then you will make the place of your feet glorious. Then shall my heart have no need of the sun to shine in it, for you yourself will be the light of it, and there shall be no night there. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Discussion Questions



Advertisers often view people primarily as potential consumers. Evidently, their efforts are effective, for many people soon learn to value material possessions and financial resources very highly. What are some of the dangers of endless human consumption?



Holding our possessions lightly is a lifelong discipline. Why should this be such an important (essential?) prerequisite to close fellowship with God?



Tozer detects a “possessive spirit” embedded deep in human nature. What inward needs do you think may be driving our preoccupation with acquiring more and better stuff? Are there any inner fears that might possibly be motivating this behavior? If so, try to name them.



The story of Abraham about to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice is deeply disturbing. What should be our practical takeaway from this troubling tale, especially if we view the story also as a pattern for what each of us needs to experience?



What habits can we develop to guard against “unjustly ruling” or viewing ourselves as superior to those under our care?



Chapter 3

Removing the Veil

Christ made it possible for us to live in God's very presence. This was symbolized by the ripping apart of the temple veil that previously separated Israelites from the Holy of Holies. Unfortunately, many Christians continue to live with such a dividing veil in their restless souls. It can be removed only through a deep experience of dying to self-love and self-interest, and a replacement delight in God's own self.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus. ~ Hebrews 10:19, KJV

Among the famous sayings of the church fathers none is better known than Augustine's, "You have formed us

for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.”¹

The great saint states here in few words the origin and interior history of the human race. God made us for himself: that is the only explanation that satisfies the *heart* of a thinking person, whatever their wild reason may say. Should faulty education and perverse reasoning lead a person to conclude otherwise, there is little that any Christian can do for them. For such an individual I have no message. My appeal is addressed to those who have been previously taught in secret by the wisdom of God; I speak to thirsty hearts whose longings have been awakened by the touch of God within them, and such as they need no reasoned proof. Their restless hearts furnish all the proof they need.

God formed us for himself. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*² asks the ancient questions *what* and *why*, and answers them in one short sentence hardly matched in any uninspired work. “*Question*: What is the chief end of man? *Answer*: Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”³ With this agree the four and twenty elders who fall on their faces to worship him that lives forever and ever, saying, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for you have created all things, and for your pleasure they are and were created” (Rev 4:11, KJV).

1 Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.5.

2 *The Westminster Confession* (1647) – The main articulation of Calvinistic Presbyterian faith. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* was developed to instruct children in the tenets of this faith tradition.

3 *Westminster Shorter Catechism* 1.

God formed us for his pleasure, and so formed us that we as well as he can in divine communion enjoy the sweet and mysterious mingling of kindred personalities. He meant us to see him and live with him and draw our life from his smile. But we have been guilty of that “foul revolt” of which Milton speaks when describing the rebellion of Satan and his hosts.⁴ We have broken with God. We have ceased to obey him or love him and in guilt and fear have fled as far as possible from his presence.

Yet who can flee from his presence when the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him (2 Chron 2:6)? When, as the Wisdom of Solomon testifies, “the Spirit of the Lord fills the world?”⁵ The omnipresence of the Lord is one thing, and is a solemn fact necessary to his perfection; the *manifest* Presence is another thing altogether, and from that Presence we have fled, like Adam, to hide among the trees of the garden (Gen 3:8–10), or like Peter to shrink away crying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8).

So, the life of humankind upon the earth is a life away from the Presence, wrenched loose from that “blissful center” which is our right and proper dwelling place, our first estate which we kept not, the loss of which is the cause of our unceasing restlessness.

The whole work of God in redemption is to undo the tragic effects of that foul revolt, and to bring us back again into right and eternal relationship with himself. This

4 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Simmons, 1667), 1.33.

5 Wisdom of Solomon 1:7. See Robert F. Lay, ed., *Books Jesus Read: Learning from the Apocrypha* (Wichita, KS: TUMI Press, 2022), 180. This statement is consistent with truths taught in the canon of inspired Scripture.

required that our sins be disposed of satisfactorily, that a full reconciliation be achieved and the way opened for us to return again into conscious communion with God and to live again in the presence as before. Then by his prevenient grace* working within us he moves us to return. This first comes to our notice when our restless hearts feel a yearning for the presence of God and we say within ourselves, “I will arise and go to my father” (Luke 15:18). That is the first step, and as the Chinese sage Lao Tzu⁶ has said, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step.”⁷

The interior journey of the soul from the wilds of sin into the enjoyed presence of God is beautifully illustrated in the Old Testament tabernacle.⁸ The returning sinner first entered the outer court where he offered a blood sacrifice on the bronze altar and washed himself in the laver⁹ that stood near it. Then through a veil he passed into the holy place where no natural light could come, but the golden candlestick, which spoke of Jesus the light of the world, threw its soft glow over all. There also was the showbread¹⁰ to tell of Jesus, the bread of life, and the altar of incense, a figure of unceasing prayer.

Though the worshiper had enjoyed so much, still he had not yet entered the presence of God. Another veil separated

6 Lao Tzu – Founder of the Asian religion now known as Daoism or Taoism, born in the sixth century BC.

7 Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, chap. 64.

8 For more details about tabernacle furnishings and worship, see Exodus 25–27 and 35–40.

9 Laver – Basin for water.

10 Showbread – Freshly baked sacred bread.



from the Holy of Holies where above the mercy seat¹¹ dwelt the very God himself in awful and glorious manifestation. While the tabernacle stood, only the high priest could enter there, and that but once a year, with blood which he offered for his sins and the sins of the people. It was this last veil which was torn when our Lord gave up the ghost¹² on Calvary, and the sacred writer explains that this tearing of the veil opened the way for every worshiper in the world to come by the new and living way straight into the divine presence.

Everything in the New Testament accords with this Old Testament picture. Ransomed individuals need no longer pause in fear to enter the Holy of Holies. *God wills that we should push on into his presence and live our whole life there.* This is to be known to us in conscious experience. It is more than a doctrine to be held, it is a life to be enjoyed every moment of every day.

This flame of the Presence was the beating heart of the Levitical order. Without it all the appointments of the tabernacle were characters of some unknown language; they had no meaning for Israel or for us. The greatest fact of the tabernacle was that *Jehovah*¹³ *was there*; a presence was waiting within the veil. Similarly, the presence of God is the central fact of Christianity. At the heart of the Christian message is God himself waiting for his redeemed children to push in to conscious awareness of his presence. That type of Christianity which happens now to be the vogue knows this Presence only in theory. It fails to stress

11 Mercy Seat – The name of the lid of the Ark of the Covenant.

12 That is, when our Lord died.

13 Jehovah – A traditional English equivalent to Yahweh, the revealed name for God in the Old Testament.

the Christian's privilege of present realization. According to its teachings we are in the presence of God positionally, and nothing is said about the need to experience that Presence actually. The fiery urge that drove people like M'Cheyne¹⁴ is wholly missing. And the present generation of Christians measures itself by this imperfect rule. A less than noble contentment takes the place of burning zeal. We are satisfied to rest in our *judicial* possessions¹⁵ and for the most part we bother ourselves very little about the absence of personal experience.

Who is this within the veil who dwells in fiery manifestations? It is none other than God himself, "one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things, visible and invisible," and "one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God; begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God; begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father," and "the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified."¹⁶ Yet this holy Trinity is one God, for "we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one: the glory equal

14 Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813–1843) – Very youthful, ardent, and devout Scottish Presbyterian minister in Dundee, known best through Andrew Bonar's spiritual classic *The Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (1844).

15 Judicial Possessions – Legal standing.

16 Quoting the Nicene Creed.

and the majesty coeternal.”¹⁷ So, in part, run the ancient creeds, and so the inspired word declares.

Behind the veil is God, that God after whom the world, with strange inconsistency, has felt, “in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him” (Acts 17:27). He has revealed himself to some extent in nature, but more perfectly in the incarnation; now he waits to show himself in ravishing¹⁸ fullness to the humble of soul and the pure in heart.

The world is perishing for lack of the knowledge of God and the church is starving for lack of his presence. The instant cure of most of our religious ills would be to enter the presence in spiritual experience, to become suddenly aware that we are in God and that God is in us. This would lift us out of our pitiful narrowness and cause our hearts to be enlarged. This would burn away the impurities from our lives as the bugs and fungi were burned away by the fire that dwelt in the bush.

What a broad world to roam in, what a sea to swim in is this God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is *eternal*, which means that he precedes time and is wholly independent of it. Time began in him and will end in him. To it he pays no tribute and from it he suffers no change. He is *immutable*, which means that he has never changed and can never change in any smallest measure. To change he would need to go from better to worse or from worse to better. He cannot do either, for being perfect he cannot become more perfect, and if he were to become less perfect, he would be less than God. He is *omniscient*, which means

17 Quoting the Athanasian Creed.

18 Ravishing – Ecstatic, overwhelming.

that he knows in one free and effortless act all matter, all spirit, all relationships, all events. He has no past and he has no future. He *is*, and none of the limiting and qualifying terms used of creatures can apply to him. *Love* and *mercy* and *righteousness* are his, and *holiness* so beyond us that no comparisons or figures are adequate to express it. Only fire can give even a remote conception of it. In fire he appeared at the burning bush (Exod 3:1–4:17); in the pillar of fire he dwelt through all the long wilderness journey (Exod 13:21–22). The fire that glowed between the wings of the cherubim in the holy place was called the “*shekinah*,” the Presence, through the years of Israel’s glory, and when the Old had given place to the New, he came at Pentecost as a fiery flame and rested upon each disciple (Acts 2:1–4).

Spinoza¹⁹ wrote of the intellectual love of God, and he had a measure of truth there; but the highest love of God is not intellectual, it is spiritual. God is spirit and only the spirit of a person can know him really. In the deep spirit of a person the fire must glow or his or her love is not the true love of God. The great of the kingdom have been those who loved God more than others did. We all know who they have been and gladly pay tribute to the depths and sincerity of their devotion. We have but to pause for a moment and their names come trooping past us smelling of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces.

Frederick Faber²⁰ was one whose soul panted after God as the deer pants after the water brook (Ps 42), and the measure in which God revealed himself to his seeking

19 Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677) – Highly rationalistic European philosopher who elaborated on such purely intellectual knowledge of God in chapter five of his *Ethics* (1677).

20 Frederick Faber (1814–1863) – English poet and hymnwriter.

heart set the good man's whole life afire with a burning adoration rivaling that of the seraphim before the throne (Isa 6:1–3). His love for God extended to the three persons of the Godhead* equally, yet he seemed to feel for each one a special kind of love reserved for him alone. Of God the Father he sings:

Only to sit and think of God,
Oh what a joy it is!
To think the thought, to breathe the Name;
Earth has no higher bliss.

Father of Jesus, love's reward!
What rapture will it be,
Prostrate before thy throne to lie,
And gaze and gaze on thee!²¹

His love for the person of Christ was so intense that it threatened to consume him; it burned within him as a sweet and holy madness and flowed from his lips like molten gold. In one of his sermons he says,

Wherever we turn in the church of God, there is Jesus. He is the beginning, middle and end of everything to us . . . There is nothing good, nothing holy, nothing beautiful, nothing joyous which he is not to his servants. No one need be poor, because, if he chooses, he can have Jesus for his own property and possession. No one need be downcast, for Jesus is the joy of heaven, and it is his joy to enter into sorrowful hearts. We can exaggerate about many things; but we can never exaggerate our obligation to Jesus, or the compassionate abundance of the love of Jesus to

21 Frederick W. Faber, *Jesus and Mary* (London: James Burns, 1849), 5–8.

us. All our lives long we might talk of Jesus, and yet we should never come to an end of the sweet things that might be said of him. Eternity will not be long enough to learn all he is, or to praise him for all he has done, but then, that matters not; for we shall be always with him, and we desire nothing more.

And addressing our Lord directly he says to him:

I love thee so, I know not how
My transports to control;
Thy love is like a burning fire
Within my very soul.²²

Faber's blazing love extended also to the Holy Spirit. Not only in his theology did he acknowledge his deity and full equality with the Father and the Son, but he celebrated it constantly in his songs and in his prayers. He literally pressed his forehead to the ground in his eager, fervent worship of the third person of the Godhead*. In one of his great hymns to the Holy Spirit he sums up his burning devotion thus:

O Spirit, beautiful and dread!²³
My heart is fit to break
With love of all thy tenderness
For us poor sinners' sake.²⁴

I have risked the weariness of quotation that I might show by pointed example what I have set out to say, namely, that God is so vastly wonderful, so utterly and completely

22 Hymn by Frederick Faber, "O Jesus, Jesus," verse 2.

23 Dread – In this instance, evoking deep reverence.

24 Hymn by Frederick Faber, "The Eternal Spirit," verse 16.

delightful that he can, without anything other than himself, meet and overflow the deepest demands of our total nature, mysterious and deep as that nature is. Such worship as Faber knew (and he is but one of a great company which no one can number) can never come from a mere doctrinal knowledge of God. Hearts that are “fit to break” with love for the Godhead* are those who have been in the presence and have looked with opened eye upon the majesty of Deity. Those with breaking hearts had a quality about them not known to or understood by common people. They habitually spoke with spiritual authority. They had been in the presence of God and they reported what they saw there. They were prophets, not scribes, for the scribe tells us what they have read, and the prophet tells what they have seen.

The distinction is not an imaginary one. Between the scribe who has read and the prophet who has seen there is a difference as wide as the sea. We are today overrun with orthodox scribes, but the prophets, where are they? The hard voice of the scribe sounds over evangelicalism, but the church waits for the tender voice of the saint who has penetrated the veil and has gazed with inward eye upon the wonder that is God. And yet, thus to penetrate, to push in sensitive living experience into the holy presence, is a privilege open to every child of God.

With the veil removed by the rending of Jesus’s flesh, with nothing on God’s side to prevent us from entering, why do we linger outside? Why do we consent to abide all our days just outside the Holy of Holies and never enter at all to look upon God? We hear the Bridegroom say, “Let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is

sweet, and your face is lovely” (Song 2:14). We sense that the call is for us, yet still we fail to draw near, and the years pass and we grow old and tired in the outer courts of the tabernacle. What hinders us?

The answer usually given, simply that we are “cold,” will not explain all the facts. There is something more serious than coldness of heart, something that may be back of that coldness and be the cause of its existence. What is it? What but the presence of *a veil in our hearts* (2 Cor 3:13–16)? A veil not taken away as the first veil was, but which remains there still shutting out the light and hiding the face of God from us. It is the veil of our fleshly fallen nature living on, unjudged within us, uncrucified and unreputed. It is the close-woven veil of the self-life which we have never truly acknowledged, of which we have been secretly ashamed, and which for these reasons we have never brought to the judgment of the cross. It is not too mysterious, this opaque veil, nor is it hard to identify. We have but to look in our own hearts and we shall see it there, sewn and patched and repaired it may be, but there nevertheless, an enemy to our lives and an effective block to our spiritual progress.

This veil is not a beautiful thing and it is not a thing about which we commonly care to talk, but I am addressing the thirsting souls who are determined to follow God, and I know they will not turn back because the way leads temporarily through the blackened hills. The urge of God within them will assure their continuing the pursuit. They will face the facts however unpleasant and endure the cross for the joy set before them. So, I am bold to name the threads out of which this inner veil is woven.

It is woven of the fine threads of the self-life, the hyphenated sins of the human spirit. They are not something we do, they are something we *are*, and therein lies both their subtlety and their power.

To be specific, the self-sins are these: self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-admiration, self-love and a host of others like them. They dwell too deep within us and are too much a part of our natures to come to our attention till the light of God is focused upon them. The grosser manifestations of these sins, egotism, exhibitionism,²⁵ self-promotion, are strangely tolerated in Christian leaders even in circles of flawless orthodoxy. They are so much in evidence as actually, for many people, to become identified with the gospel. I trust it is not a cynical observation to say that they appear these days to be a requirement for popularity in some sections of the church visible. Promoting self under the guise of promoting Christ is currently so common as to excite little notice.

One should suppose that proper instruction in the doctrines of human depravity and the necessity for justification through the righteousness of Christ alone would deliver us from the power of the self-sins; but it does not work out that way. Self can live unrebuked at the very altar. It can watch the bleeding Victim die and not be in the least affected by what it sees. It can fight for the faith of the Reformers and preach eloquently the creed of salvation by grace, and gain strength by its efforts. To tell all the truth, it seems actually to feed upon orthodoxy and is more at home in a Bible conference than in a tavern. Our

25 Exhibitionism – Showing off.

very state of longing after God may afford it an excellent condition under which to thrive and grow.

Self is the opaque veil that hides the face of God from us. It can be removed only in spiritual experience, never by mere instruction. As well try to instruct leprosy out of our system. There must be a work of God in destruction before we are free. We must invite the cross to do its deadly work within us. We must bring our self-sins to the cross for judgment. We must prepare ourselves for an ordeal of suffering in some measure like that through which our Savior passed when he suffered under Pontius Pilate.

Let us remember: when we talk of the tearing of the veil we are speaking in a figure,²⁶ and the thought of it is poetical, almost pleasant; but in actuality there is nothing pleasant about it. In human experience that veil is made of living spiritual tissue; it is composed of the sentient,²⁷ quivering stuff of which our whole beings consist, and to touch it is to touch us where we feel pain. To tear it away is to injure us, to hurt us and make us bleed. To say otherwise is to make the cross no cross and death no death at all. It is never fun to die. To rip through the dear and tender stuff of which life is made can never be anything but deeply painful. Yet that is what the cross did to Jesus and it is what the cross would do to every individual to set them free.

Let us beware of tinkering with our inner life in hope ourselves to rend the veil. God must do everything for us. Our part is to yield and trust. We must confess, forsake, repudiate the self-life, and then reckon it crucified. But we must be careful to distinguish lazy “acceptance” from the

²⁶ Figure – A figure of speech; speaking in metaphorical terms.

²⁷ Sentient – Sensing, feeling.

real work of God. We must insist upon the work being done. We dare not rest content with a neat doctrine of self-crucifixion. That is to imitate Saul and spare the best of the sheep and the oxen.

Insist that the work be done in very truth and it will be done. The cross is rough, and it is deadly, but it is effective. It does not keep its victim hanging there forever. There comes a moment when its work is finished and the suffering victim dies. After that is resurrection glory and power, and the pain is forgotten for joy that the veil is taken away and we have entered in actual spiritual experience the presence of the living God.

Prayer

Lord, how excellent are your ways, and how devious and dark are the ways of people. Show us how to die, that we may rise again to newness of life. Tear the veil of our self-life from the top down as you tore the veil of the temple. We would draw near in full assurance of faith. We would dwell with you in daily experience here on this earth so that we may be accustomed to the glory when we enter your heaven to dwell with you there. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Discussion Questions



This chapter begins with Augustine's famous prayer to God: "You have formed us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you." What do you see as the chronic practices and distractions that keep people in society, and sometimes even in the church, spiritually restless and unfulfilled?



A veil hides things, obstructs clear views, and becomes an obstacle against access. Based on this chapter, describe the spiritual "veil" that gets in the way of our ability to see God and to commune directly with him.



Self-love and self-interest are deeply seated human instincts, and they are not easily overcome. They cannot simply be suppressed; they must be replaced by something superior and more satisfying. To what does Tozer point us as an alternative focus for our affections?



Each day brings a series of opportunities to "die" to ourselves, and to the self-love instinct that still surges up within us. How can we embrace this principle of taking up our cross daily, while at the same time maintaining a deep and transforming awareness of how much God values us, and of the intrinsic worth we have in his eyes?



On the positive side, what practices and disciplines can we intentionally adopt in order to deepen and grow our ability to delight in God's own self in self-forgetful freedom?



THEOLOGY & ETHICS



Chapter 4

Apprehending God the Universal Presence

God must be more to us than a mere logical inference from arguments or evidence; we also need to apprehend him through direct personal experience. As Christians, we need to take more seriously the reality of the unseen spiritual world generally, and the reality of God in particular. Through regeneration, believers acquire new soul capacities to become attuned to these spiritual realities. God has always been everywhere present, close by and with us in the here and now. And he wants to show himself to us. But this requires hearts that are truly welcoming toward him, and willing to practice the slow, steady spiritual disciplines that increase our capacity for fellowship with God.

Apprehending God

Taste and see. ~ Psalm 34:8

It was Canon Holmes, of India,¹ who more than twenty-five years ago called attention to the inferential character of the average person's faith in God. To most people God is an inference, not a reality. He is a deduction from evidence which they consider adequate; but he remains personally unknown to the individual. "He *must* be," they say, "therefore we believe he is." Others do not go even so far as this; they know of him only by hearsay. They have never bothered to think the matter out for themselves, but have heard about him from others, and have put belief in him into the back of their minds along with the various odds and ends that make up their total creed. To many others God is but an ideal, another name for goodness, or beauty, or truth; or he is law, or life, or the creative impulse back of the human experience of existence.

These notions about God are many and varied, but they who hold them have one thing in common: they do not know God in personal experience. The possibility of intimate acquaintance with him has not entered their minds. While admitting his existence they do not think of him as knowable in the sense that we know things or people.

Christians, to be sure, go further than this, at least in theory. Their creed requires them to believe in the personality of God, and they have been taught to pray, "Our Father in heaven" (Matt 6:9). Now personality and

1 W. G. Holmes – Anglican clergyman, missionary and theologian.

fatherhood carry with them the idea of the possibility of personal acquaintance. This is admitted, I say, in theory, but for millions of Christians, nevertheless, God is no more real than he is to the non-Christian. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle.

Over against all this cloudy vagueness stands the clear scriptural doctrine that God can be known in personal experience. A loving personality dominates the Bible, walking among the trees of the garden and breathing fragrance over every scene. Always a living person is present, speaking, pleading, loving, working, and manifesting himself whenever and wherever his people have the receptivity necessary to receive the manifestation.

The Bible assumes as a self-evident fact that people can know God with at least the same degree of immediacy² as they know any other person or thing that comes within the field of their experience. The same terms are used to express the knowledge of God as are used to express knowledge of physical things. “*Taste and see that the Lord is good*” (Ps 34:8). “*All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces*” (Ps 45:8). “*My sheep hear My voice*” (John 10:27). “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Matt 5:8). These are but four of countless such passages from the word of God. And more important than any proof-text is the fact that the whole import of the Scripture is toward this belief.

What can all this mean except that we have in our hearts organs by means of which we can know God as certainly as we know material things through our familiar five senses?

2 Immediacy – Direct encounter.

We apprehend the physical world by exercising the faculties given us for the purpose, and we possess spiritual faculties by means of which we can know God and the spiritual world if we will obey the Spirit's urge and begin to use them.

That a saving work must first be done in the heart is taken for granted here. The spiritual faculties of the unregenerate person lie asleep in their nature, unused and for every purpose dead; that is the stroke which has fallen upon us by sin. They may be revitalized to active life again by the operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration; that is one of the immeasurable benefits which come to us through Christ's atoning work on the cross.

But the very ransomed children of God themselves: why do they know so little of that habitual conscious communion with God which the Scriptures seem to offer? The answer is our chronic unbelief. Faith enables our spiritual sense to function. Where faith is defective the result will be inward insensibility and numbness toward spiritual things. This is the condition of vast numbers of Christians today. No proof is necessary to support that statement. We have but to converse with the first Christian we meet or enter the first church we find open to acquire all the proof we need.

A spiritual kingdom exists all about us, enclosing us, embracing us, altogether within reach of our inner selves, waiting for us to recognize it. God himself is here waiting our response to his presence. This eternal world will come alive to us the moment we begin to reckon upon its reality. I have just now used two words which demand definition; or if definition is impossible, I must at least make clear what I mean when I use them. They are *reckon* and *reality*.

What do I mean by *reality*? I mean that which has existence apart from any idea any mind may have of it, and which would exist if there were no mind anywhere to entertain a thought of it. That which is real has being in itself. It does not depend upon the observer for its validity.

I am aware that there are those who love to poke fun at the plain person's idea of reality. They are the idealists who spin endless proofs that nothing is real outside of the mind. They are the relativists who like to show that there are no fixed points in the universe from which we can measure anything. They smile down upon us from their lofty intellectual peaks and settle us to their own satisfaction by fastening upon us the reproachful term *absolutist*. The Christian is not flustered by this show of contempt. He or she can smile right back at them, for they know that there is only one who is absolute, that is God. But they know also that the Absolute One has made this world for humankind's uses, and, while there is nothing fixed or real in the last meaning of the words (the meaning as applied to God) *for every purpose of human life we are permitted to act as if there were*. And everyone does act thus except the mentally sick. These unfortunates also have trouble with reality, but they are consistent; they insist upon living in accordance with their ideas of things. They are honest, and it is their very honesty that constitutes them a social problem.

The idealists and relativists are not mentally sick. They prove their soundness by living their lives according to the very notions of reality which they in theory repudiate and by counting upon the very fixed points which they prove are not there. They could earn a lot more respect for their notions if they were willing to live by them; but this

they are careful not to do. Their ideas are brain-deep, not life-deep. Wherever life touches them they repudiate their theories and live like other people.

Christians are too sincere to play with ideas for their own sake. They take no pleasure in the mere spinning of gossamer³ webs for display. All their beliefs are practical. They are geared into their life. By them they live or die, stand or fall for this world and for all time to come. From the insincere person they turn away.

Sincere plain people know that the world is real. They find it here when they wake to consciousness, and they know that they did not think it into being. It was here waiting for them when they came, and they know that when they prepare to leave this earthly scene it will be here still to bid them goodbye as they depart. By the deep wisdom of life, they are wiser than a thousand human beings who doubt. They stand upon the earth and feel the wind and rain in their face and they know that these things are real. They see the sun by day and the stars by night. They see the hot lightning play out of the dark thundercloud. They hear the sounds of nature and the cries of human joy and pain. These they know are real. They lie down on the cool earth at night and have no fear that it will prove illusory or fail them while they sleep. In the morning the firm ground will be under them, the blue sky above them and the rocks and trees around them as when they closed their eyes the night before. So, they live and rejoice in a world of reality.

With their five senses they engage this real world. All things necessary to their physical existence they apprehend by the faculties with which they have been equipped by the

3 Gossamer – Thin, delicate, sheer.

God who created them and placed them in such a world as this.

Now, by our definition also God is real. He is real in the absolute and final sense that nothing else is. All other reality is contingent upon his. The great reality is God who is the author of that lower and dependent reality which makes up the sum of created things, including ourselves. God has objective existence independent of and apart from any notions which we may have about him. The worshiping heart does not create its object. It finds him here when it wakes from its moral slumber in the morning of its regeneration.

Another word that must be cleared up is the word *reckon*.⁴ This does not mean to visualize or imagine. Imagination is not faith. The two are not only different from, but stand in sharp opposition to, each other. Imagination projects unreal images out of the mind and seeks to attach reality to them. Faith creates nothing; it simply reckons upon that which is already *there*.

God and the spiritual world are real. We can reckon upon them with as much assurance as we reckon upon the familiar world around us. Spiritual things are there (or rather we should say *here*) inviting our attention and challenging our trust.

Our trouble is that we have established bad thought habits. We habitually think of the visible world as real and doubt the reality of any other. We do not deny the existence of the spiritual world but we doubt that it is real in the accepted meaning of the word.

4 Reckon – To count on.

The world of sense intrudes upon our attention day and night for the whole of our lifetime. It is clamorous,⁵ insistent and self-demonstrating. It does not appeal to our faith; it is here, assaulting our five senses, demanding to be accepted as real and final. But sin has so clouded the lenses of our hearts that we cannot see that other reality, the city of God, shining around us. The world of sense triumphs. The visible becomes the enemy of the invisible; the temporal, of the eternal. That is the curse inherited by every member of Adam's tragic race.

At the root of the Christian life lies belief in the invisible. The object of the Christian's faith is unseen reality.

Our uncorrected thinking, influenced by the blindness of our natural hearts and the intrusive ubiquity⁶ of visible things, tends to draw a contrast between the spiritual and the real; but actually, no such contrast exists. The antithesis⁷ lies elsewhere: between the real and the imaginary, between the spiritual and the material, between the temporal and the eternal; but between the spiritual and the real, never. The spiritual is real.

We must break the evil habit of ignoring the spiritual. We must shift our interest from the seen to the unseen. For the great unseen reality is God.

If we would rise into that region of light and power plainly beckoning us through the Scriptures of truth, we must

5 Clamorous – Noisy.

6 Ubiquity – The state of being everywhere present.

7 Antithesis– Complete opposite.

break the evil habit of ignoring the spiritual. We must shift our interest from the seen to the unseen. For the great unseen reality is God. "He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb 11:6). This is basic in the life of faith. From there we can rise to unlimited heights. "You believe in God," said our Lord Jesus Christ, "believe also in Me" (John 14:1). Without the first there can be no second.

If we truly want to follow God, we must seek to be otherworldly. This I say knowing well that that word has been used with scorn by the children of this world and applied to the Christian as a badge of reproach. So be it. Every person must choose their world. If we who follow Christ, with all the facts before us and knowing what we are about, deliberately choose the kingdom of God as our sphere of interest I see no reason why anyone should object. If we lose by it, the loss is our own; if we gain, we rob no one by so doing. The "other world," which is the object of this world's disdain and the subject of the drunkard's mocking song, is our carefully chosen goal and the object of our holiest longing.

*But we must avoid the common fault of pushing the
"other world" into the future. It is not future, but present.*

But we must avoid the common fault of pushing the "other world" into the future. It is not future, but present. It parallels our familiar physical world, and the doors between the two worlds are open. "You have come," says the writer to the Hebrews (and the tense is plainly present), "to Mount Zion and to the city of the living

God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” All these things are contrasted with “the mountain that may be touched” and “the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words” that might be heard (Heb 12:18–24). May we not safely conclude that, as the realities of Mount Sinai were apprehended by the senses, so the realities of Mount Zion are to be grasped by the soul? And this not by any trick of the imagination, but in downright actuality. The soul has eyes with which to see and ears with which to hear. Feeble they may be from long disuse, but by the life-giving touch of Christ alive now and capable of sharpest sight and most sensitive hearing.

As we begin to focus upon God the things of the spirit will take shape before our inner eyes. Obedience to the word of Christ will bring an inward revelation of the Godhead* (John 14:21–23). It will give acute perception enabling us to see God even as is promised to the pure in heart. A new God-consciousness will seize upon us and we shall begin to taste and hear and inwardly feel the God who is our life and our all. There will be seen the constant shining of the light that enlightens everyone that comes into the world. More and more, as our faculties grow sharper and more reliable, God will become to us the great All, and his presence the glory and wonder of our lives.

Prayer

O God, awaken to life every power within me, that I may lay hold on eternal things. Open my eyes that I may see; give me acute spiritual perception; enable me to taste you and know that you are good. Make heaven more real to me than any earthly thing has ever been. Amen.

The Universal Presence

*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where
can I flee from Your presence? ~ Psalm 139:7*

In all Christian teaching certain basic truths are found, hidden at times, and rather assumed than asserted, but necessary to all truth as the primary colors are found in and necessary to the finished painting. Such a truth is the divine immanence.⁸

God dwells in his creation and is everywhere fully present in all his works. This is boldly taught by prophet and apostle and is accepted by Christian theology generally. That is, it appears in the books, but for some reason it has not sunk into the average Christian's heart so as to become a part of their believing self. Christian teachers shy away from its full implications, and, if they mention it at all, mute it down till it has little meaning. I would guess the reason for

8 Divine Immanence – The doctrine that God is here, everywhere present and near.

this to be the fear of being charged with pantheism;⁹ but the doctrine of the divine Presence is definitely not pantheism.

Pantheism's error is too palpable to deceive anyone. It is that God is the sum of all created things. Nature and God are one, so that whoever touches a leaf or a stone touches God. That is of course to degrade the glory of the incorruptible Deity and, in an effort to make all things divine, banish all divinity from the world entirely.

The truth is that while God dwells in his world, he is separated from it by a great divide forever uncrossable. However closely he may be identified with the work of his hands they are and must eternally be *other than he*, and he is and must be prior to and independent of them. He is transcendent above all his works even while he is immanent within them.

What now does the divine immanence mean in direct Christian experience? It means simply that *God is here*. Wherever we are, God is here. There is no place, there can be no place, where he is not. Ten million intelligences standing at as many points in space and separated by incomprehensible distances can each say with equal truth, "God is here." No point is nearer to God than any other point. It is exactly as near to God from any place as it is from any other place. No one is in mere distance any further from or any nearer to God than any other person is.

These are truths believed by every instructed Christian. It remains for us to think on them and pray over them until they begin to glow within us.

9 Pantheism – The notion that everything *is* God.

“In the beginning God” (Gen 1:1). Not *matter*, for matter is not self-causing. It requires a prior cause, and God is that cause. Not *law*, for law is but a name for the course which all creation follows. That course had to be planned, and the planner is God. Not *mind*, for mind also is a created thing and must have a creator back of it. In the beginning God, the uncaused cause of matter, mind and law. There we must begin.

Adam sinned and, in his panic, frantically tried to do the impossible: he tried to hide from the presence of God (Gen 3:8–10). David also must have had wild thoughts of trying to escape from the Presence, for he wrote, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” (Ps 139:7). Then he proceeded through one of his most beautiful psalms to celebrate the glory of the divine immanence. “If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me” (Ps 139:8–10). And he knew that God’s *being* and God’s *seeing* are the same, that the seeing Presence had been with him even before he was born, watching the mystery of unfolding life. Solomon exclaimed, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built” (1 Kgs 8:27). Paul assured the Athenians that God “is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:27–28).

If God is present at every point in space, if we cannot go where he is not, cannot even conceive of a place where he is not, why then has not that Presence become the one

universally celebrated fact of the world? The patriarch Jacob, “in the wasteland, a howling wilderness,” gave the answer to that question (Deut 32:10). He saw a vision of God and cried out in wonder, “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it” (Gen 28:16). Jacob had never been for one small division of a moment outside the circle of that all-pervading Presence. But he knew it not. That was his trouble, and it is ours. People do not know that God is here. What a difference it would make if they knew.

On our part there must be surrender to the Spirit of God, for his work it is to show us the Father and the Son. If we cooperate with him in loving obedience, God will manifest himself to us.

The Presence and the manifestation of the Presence are not the same. There can be the one without the other. God is here when we are wholly unaware of it. He is *manifest* only when and as we are aware of his presence. On our part there must be surrender to the Spirit of God, for his work it is to show us the Father and the Son. If we cooperate with him in loving obedience, God will manifest himself to us, and that manifestation will be the difference between a nominal Christian life and a life radiant with the light of his face.

Always, everywhere God is present, and always he seeks to disclose himself. To each one he would reveal not only that he is, but *what* he is as well. He did not have to be persuaded to disclose himself to Moses. “Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord” (Exod 34:5). He not only made a verbal proclamation of his nature but he also revealed his



very self to Moses so that the skin of Moses's face shone with the supernatural light. It will be a great moment for some of us when we begin to believe that God's promise of self-revelation is literally true: that he promised much, but promised no more than he intends to fulfill.

Our pursuit of God is successful just because he is forever seeking to manifest himself to us. The revelation of God to any individual is not God coming from a distance upon a time to pay a brief and momentous visit to the person's soul. To think of it this way is to misunderstand it all. The approach of God to the soul or of the soul to God is not to be thought of in spatial terms at all. There is no idea of physical distance involved in the concept. It is not a matter of miles but of experience.

To speak of being near to or far from God is to use language in a sense always understood when applied to our ordinary human relationships. A man may say, "I feel that my son is coming nearer to me as he gets older," and yet that son has lived by his father's side since he was born and has never been away from home more than a day or so in his entire life. What then can the father mean? Obviously, he is speaking of *experience*. He means that the boy is coming to know him more intimately and with deeper understanding, that the barriers of thought and feeling between the two are disappearing, that father and son are becoming more closely united in mind and heart.

So, when we sing, "Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord," we are not thinking of the nearness of place, but of the nearness of relationship.¹⁰ It is for increasing degrees of awareness that we pray, for a more perfect consciousness

10 Hymn by Fanny Crosby, "I Am Thine, O Lord, I Have Heard Thy Voice" (1875).

of the divine Presence. We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. He is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts.

Why do some persons “find” God in a way that others do not? Why does God manifest his presence to some and let multitudes of others struggle along in the half-light of imperfect Christian experience? Of course, the will of God is the same for all. He has no favorites within his household. All he has ever done for any of his children he will do for all of his children. The difference lies not with God but with us.

Pick at random a score of great saints whose lives and testimonies are widely known. Let them be Bible characters or well-known Christians of post-biblical times. You will be struck instantly with the fact that the saints were not alike. Sometimes the dissimilarities were so great as to be positively glaring. How different for example was Moses from Isaiah; how different was Elijah from David; how unlike each other were John and Paul, Francis of Assisi and Luther, Finney¹¹ and Thomas à Kempis.¹² The differences are as wide as human life itself: differences of race, nationality, education, temperament, habit and personal qualities. Yet they all walked, each in their day, upon a high road of spiritual living far above the common way.

Their differences must have been incidental and in the eyes of God of no significance. In some vital quality they must have been alike. What was it? I venture to suggest that the one vital quality which they had in common

11 Charles Finney (1792–1875) – Influential American evangelist.

12 Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471) – Author of the medieval spiritual classic *The Imitation of Christ*.

was *spiritual receptivity*. Something in them was open to heaven, something which urged them Godward. Without attempting anything like a profound analysis I shall say simply that they had spiritual awareness and that they went on to cultivate it until it became the biggest thing in their lives. They differed from the average person in that when they felt the inward longing, *they did something about it*. They acquired the lifelong habit of spiritual response. They were not disobedient to the heavenly vision. As David put it neatly, “When You said, ‘Seek my face,’ my heart said to You, ‘Your face, Lord, I will seek’” (Ps 27:8).

As with everything good in human life, back of this receptivity is God. The sovereignty of God is here, and is felt even by those who have not placed particular stress upon it theologically. The pious Michelangelo¹³ confessed this in a sonnet:

My unassisted heart is barren clay,
That of its native self can nothing feed:
Of good and pious works thou art the seed,
That quickens only where thou sayest it may:
Unless thou show to us thine own true way
No man can find it: Father! Thou must lead.

These words will repay study as the deep and serious testimony of a great Christian.

Important as it is that we recognize God working in us, I would yet warn against a too-great preoccupation with the thought. It is a sure road to sterile passivity. God will not hold us responsible to understand the mysteries of election, predestination and the divine sovereignty. The

13 Michelangelo (1475–1564) – A great Renaissance sculptor.

best and safest way to deal with these truths is to raise our eyes to God and in deepest reverence say, “O Lord, you know” (Rev 7:14). Those things belong to the deep and profound mystery of God’s omniscience. Prying into them may make theologians, but it will never make saints.

Receptivity is not a single thing; it is a compound rather, a blending of several elements within the soul. It is an affinity for, a bent toward, a sympathetic response to, a desire to have. From this it may be gathered that it can be present in degrees, that we may have little or more or less, depending upon the individual. It may be increased by exercise or destroyed by neglect. It is not a sovereign and irresistible force which comes upon us as a seizure from above. It is a gift of God, indeed, but one which must be recognized and cultivated as any other gift if it is to realize the purpose for which it was given.

It is a gift of God, indeed, but one which must be recognized and cultivated as any other gift if it is to realize the purpose for which it was given.

Failure to see this is the cause of a very serious breakdown in modern evangelicalism. The idea of cultivation and exercise, so dear to the saints of old, has now no place in our total religious picture. It is too slow, too common. We now demand glamour and fast flowing dramatic action. A generation of Christians reared among push buttons and automatic machines grows impatient with slower and less direct methods of reaching their goals. We have been trying to apply machine-age methods to our relations with God. We read our chapter, have our short

devotions and rush away, hoping to make up for our deep inward bankruptcy by attending another gospel meeting or listening to another thrilling story told by a religious adventurer lately returned from afar.

The tragic results of this spirit are all about us. Shallow lives, hollow religious philosophies, the dominance of the element of fun in gospel meetings, the glorification of human individuals, trust in religious externalities, quasi-religious fellowships, salesmanship methods, the mistaking of dynamic personality for the power of the Spirit: these and such as these are the symptoms of an evil disease, a deep and serious malady of the soul.

For this great sickness that is upon us no one person is responsible, and no Christian is wholly free from blame. We have all contributed, directly or indirectly, to this sad state of affairs. We have been too blind to see, or too timid to speak out, or too self-satisfied to desire anything better than the poor average diet with which others appear satisfied. To put it differently, we have accepted one another's notions, copied one another's lives and made one another's experiences the model for our own. And for a generation the trend has been downward. Now we have reached a low place of sand and burnt wire grass¹⁴ and, worst of all, we have made the word of truth conform to our experience and accepted this low plane as the very pasture of the blessed.

It will require a determined heart and more than a little courage to wrench ourselves loose from the grip of our times and return to biblical ways. But it can be done. Every now and then in the past Christians have had to

14 Wire Grass – Dried-up stubble.

do it. History has recorded several large-scale returns led by such men as Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther and George Fox.¹⁵ Unfortunately, there seems to be no Luther or Fox on the horizon at present. Whether or not another such return may be expected before the coming of Christ is a question upon which Christians are not fully agreed, but that is not of too great importance to us now.

What God in his sovereignty may yet do on a world scale I do not claim to know: but what he will do for the plain man or woman who seeks his face I believe I do know and can tell others. Let anyone turn to God in earnest, let them begin to exercise themselves unto godliness, let them seek to develop their powers of spiritual receptivity by trust and obedience and humility, and the results will exceed anything they may have hoped in their leaner and weaker days.

Anyone who by repentance and a sincere return to God will break themselves out of the mold in which they have been held, and will go to the Bible itself for their spiritual standards, will be delighted with what they find there.

Let us say it again: The universal Presence is a fact. God is here. The whole universe is alive with his life. And he is no strange or foreign God, but the familiar Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whose love has for these thousands of years enfolded the sinful race of human beings. And always he is trying to get our attention, to reveal himself to us, to communicate with us. We have within us the ability

15 George Fox (1624–1691) – An Englishman who, despite limited formal education, became the principal founder and organizer of the Quakers, a renewal movement within Protestantism that emphasized the contemplative and experiential dimensions of life with God.

to know him if we will but respond to his overtures.¹⁶ (And this we call pursuing God!) We will know him in increasing degree as our receptivity becomes more perfect by faith and love and practice.

Prayer

O God and Father, I repent of my sinful preoccupation with visible things. The world has been too much with me. You have been here and I knew it not. I have been blind to your presence. Open my eyes that I may behold you in and around me. For Christ's sake, Amen.

16 Overtures – Invitations.

Discussion Questions



The modern worldview has little regard for the unseen spiritual dimension of reality. Christians must not ignore this spiritual reality, but instead give it priority. And so, Tozer declares, “We must seek to be otherworldly.” Describe a right understanding of such otherworldliness, and also an improper understanding of it that we need to avoid.



God, says Tozer, must be more to us than a mere logical inference from evidence. He must also be apprehended through direct personal experience. However, some Christians feel nervous whenever the subject of lived Christian experience comes up. Why do you think this is? Might their concern be justified, at least in some instances? And if so, what might be the best way to address such concern?



One of the secrets to a strong Christian life, says Tozer, is to reckon on the reality of the unseen dimension of our existence, and on the reality of God’s presence in the midst of it all. How is such reckoning (or considering, in many newer Bible translations) different from merely making stuff up?



Receptivity to God, says Tozer, “may be increased by exercise or destroyed by neglect.” What practical steps may you need to take to cultivate and increase your own receptivity to God?



Tozer suggests that obedience is an essential precondition for sustaining a conscious awareness of God's presence in our lives. Why might this be so? What spiritual dynamics might be involved?



Chapter 5

The Speaking Voice

God, who is everywhere a present reality, is also, by his very nature, continuously speaking. He is here, and he is not silent. His communications are not restricted to words conveyed long ago in Bible times; his voice is alive, and he speaks in the present tense as well. We live in a world of noisy distractions. Therefore, Christians must learn to practice the unfamiliar discipline of listening carefully, of becoming more attuned to God's voice, of being still in order to hear and know.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was
with God, and the Word was God. ~ John 1:1*

An intelligent plain man or woman, untaught in the truths of Christianity, coming upon this text, would likely conclude that John meant to teach that it is the nature

of God to speak, to communicate his thoughts to others. And they would be right. A word is a medium by which thoughts are expressed, and the application of the term to the eternal Son leads us to believe that self-expression is inherent in the Godhead*, that God is forever seeking to speak himself out to his creation. The whole Bible supports the idea. God is speaking. Not God spoke, but *God is speaking*. He is by his nature continuously articulate. He fills the world with his speaking voice.

One of the great realities with which we have to deal is the voice of God in his world. The briefest and only satisfying cosmogony¹ is this: “He spoke, and it was done” (Ps 33:9). The *why* of natural law is the living *voice* of God immanent in his creation. And this word of God which brought all worlds into being cannot be understood to mean the Bible, for it is not a written or printed word at all, but the expression of the will of God spoken into the structure of all things. This word of God is the breath of God filling the world with living potentiality. The voice of God is the most powerful force in nature, indeed the only force in nature, for all energy is here only because the power-filled word is being spoken.

The Bible is the written word of God, and because it is written it is confined and limited by the necessities of ink and paper and leather. The voice of God, however, is alive and free as the sovereign God is free. “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). The life is in the speaking words. God’s word in the Bible can have power only because it corresponds to God’s word in the universe. It is the present voice which makes the

1 Cosmogony – Theory of the origins of the universe.

written word all-powerful. Otherwise, it would lie locked in slumber within the covers of a book.

We take a low and primitive view of things when we conceive of God at the creation coming into physical contact with things, shaping and fitting and building like a carpenter. The Bible teaches otherwise: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps 33:6, 9). “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Heb 11:3). Again, we must remember that God is referring here not to his written word, but to his speaking voice. His world-filling voice is meant, that voice which precedes the Bible by uncounted centuries, that voice which has not been silent since the dawn of creation, but is sounding still throughout the full far reaches of the universe.

The word of God is quick and powerful. In the beginning he spoke to nothing, and it became *something*. Chaos heard it and became order, darkness heard it and became light. “And God said . . . and it was so” (Gen 1:6–7, 9, 11, 14–15, 24, 29–30, KJV). These twin phrases, as cause and effect, occur throughout the Genesis story of the creation. The *said* accounts for the *so*. The *so* is the *said* put into the continuous present.

That God is here and that he is speaking—these truths are back of all other Bible truths; without them there could be no revelation at all. God did not write a book and send it by messenger to be read at a distance by unaided minds. He spoke a book and lives in his spoken words, constantly speaking his words and causing the power of them to

persist across the years. God breathed on clay and it became a man; he breathes on men and they become clay. “Return to dust, you mortals” was the word spoken at the fall by which God decreed the death of every person, and no added word has he needed to speak (Ps 90:3, NIV; Gen 3:19). The sad procession of humankind across the face of the earth from birth to the grave is proof that his original word was enough.

We have not given sufficient attention to that deep utterance in the book of John, “That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:9). Shift the punctuation around as we will and the truth is still there: the word of God affects the hearts of everyone as light in the soul. In the hearts of everyone the light shines, the word sounds, and there is no escaping them. Something like this would of necessity be so if God is alive and in his world. And John says that it is so. Even those persons who have never heard of the Bible have still been preached to with sufficient clarity to remove every excuse from their hearts forever. “Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them” (Rom 2:15). “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse” (Rom 1:20, NIV).

This universal voice of God was by the ancient Hebrews often called wisdom, and was said to be everywhere sounding and searching throughout the earth, seeking some response from people. The eighth chapter of the book of Proverbs begins, “Does not wisdom cry out, and

understanding lift up her voice?" The writer then pictures wisdom as a beautiful woman standing "on the top of the high hill, beside the way, where the paths meet." She sounds her voice from every quarter so that no one may miss hearing it. "To you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men" (Prov 8:1–4). Then she pleads for the simple and the foolish to give ear to her words. It is spiritual response for which this wisdom of God is pleading, a response which she has always sought and is but rarely able to secure. The tragedy is that our eternal welfare depends upon our hearing, and we have trained our ears not to hear.

This universal voice has ever sounded, and it has often troubled people even when they did not understand the source of their fears. Could it be that this voice distilling like a living mist upon people's hearts has been the undiscovered cause of the troubled conscience and the longing for immortality confessed by millions since the dawn of recorded history? We need not fear to face up to this. The speaking voice is a fact. How humans have reacted to it is for any observer to note.

When God spoke out of heaven to our Lord, self-centered people who heard it explained it by natural causes: they said, "It thundered" (John 12:29, KJV). This habit of explaining the voice by appeals to natural law is at the very root of modern science. In the living breathing cosmos, there is a mysterious Something, too wonderful, too awesome for any mind to understand. The believing person does not claim to understand. They fall to their knees and whisper, "God." The person of earth kneels also, but not to worship. They kneel to examine, to search, to find the cause and the how of things. Just now we happen to be living in a secular

age. Our thought habits are those of the scientist, not those of the worshiper. We are more likely to explain than to adore. "It thundered," we exclaim, and go our earthly way. But still the voice sounds and searches. The order and life of the world depend upon that voice, but people are mostly too busy or too stubborn to give attention.

Every one of us has had experiences which we have not been able to explain: a sudden sense of loneliness, or a feeling of wonder or awe in the face of the universal vastness. Or we have had a fleeting visitation of light like an illumination from some other sun, giving us in a quick flash an assurance that we are from another world, that our origins are divine. What we saw there, or felt, or heard, may have been contrary to all that we had been taught in the schools and at wide variance with all our former beliefs and opinions. We were forced to suspend our acquired doubts while, for a moment, the clouds were rolled back and we saw and heard for ourselves. Explain such things as we will, I think we have not been fair to the facts until we allow at least the possibility that such experiences may arise from the presence of God in the world and his persistent effort to communicate with humankind. Let us not dismiss such a hypothesis too flippantly.

It is my own belief (and here I shall not feel bad if no one follows me) that every good and beautiful thing that people have produced in the world has been the result of their faulty and sin-blocked response to the creative voice sounding over the earth. The moral philosophers who dreamed their high dreams of virtue, the religious thinkers who speculated about God and immortality, the poets and artists who created out of common stuff

pure and lasting beauty: how can we explain them? It is not enough to say simply, “It was genius.” What then is genius? Could it be that a genius is a person haunted by the speaking voice, laboring and striving like one possessed to achieve ends which they only vaguely understand? That the great person may have missed God in their labors, that they may even have spoken or written against God does not destroy the idea I am advancing. God’s redemptive revelation in the Holy Scriptures is necessary to saving faith and peace with God. Faith in a risen Savior is necessary if the vague stirrings toward immortality are to bring us to restful and satisfying communion with God. To me this is a plausible explanation of all that is best out of Christ. But you can be a good Christian and not accept my thesis.

The voice of God is a friendly voice. No one need fear to listen to it unless he has already made up his mind to resist it.

The voice of God is a friendly voice. No one need fear to listen to it unless he has already made up his mind to resist it. The blood of Jesus has covered not only the human race but all creation as well. “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col 1:20, KJV). We may safely preach a friendly heaven. The heavens as well as the earth are filled with the good will of him that dwelt in the bush. The perfect blood of atonement secures this forever.

Whoever will listen will hear the speaking heaven. This is definitely not the hour when people take kindly to an exhortation to *listen*, for listening is not today a part of

popular religion. We are at the opposite end of the pole from there. Religion has accepted the monstrous heresy that noise, size, activity and bluster make a person dear to God. But we may take heart. To a people caught in the tempest of the last great conflict God says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10), and still he says it, as if he means to tell us that our strength and safety lie not in noise but in silence.

It is important that we get still to wait on God. And it is best that we get alone, preferably with our Bible outspread before us. Then if we will we may draw near to God and begin to hear him speak to us in our hearts (Jas 4:8). I think for the average person the progression will be something like this: First a sound as of a presence walking in the garden. Then a voice, more intelligible, but still far from clear. Then the happy moment when the Spirit begins to illuminate the Scriptures, and that which had been only a sound, or at best a voice, now becomes an intelligible word, warm and intimate and clear as the word of a dear friend. Then will come life and light, and best of all, ability to see and rest in and embrace Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and all.

*The Bible will never be a living book to us until we
are convinced that God is articulate in his universe.*

The Bible will never be a living book to us until we are convinced that God is articulate in his universe. To jump from a dead, impersonal world to a dogmatic Bible is too much for most people. They may admit that they *should* accept the Bible as the word of God, and they may try to think of it as such, but they find it impossible to believe



that the words there on the page are actually for them. Someone may say, “These words are addressed to me,” and yet in their heart not feel and know that they are. They are the victim of a divided psychology. They try to think of God as mute everywhere else and vocal only in a book.

The facts are that God is not silent, has never been silent. It is the nature of God to speak.

I believe that much of our religious unbelief is due to a wrong conception of and a wrong feeling for the Scriptures of truth. A silent God suddenly began to speak in a book and when the book was finished lapsed back into silence again forever. Now we read the book as the record of what God said when he was for a brief time in a speaking mood. With notions like that in our heads, how can we believe? The facts are that God is not silent, has never been silent. It is the nature of God to speak. The second person of the Holy Trinity is called the *Word*. The Bible is the inevitable outcome of God’s continuous speech. It is the infallible² declaration of his mind for us put into our familiar human words.

I think a new world will arise out of the religious mists when we approach our Bible with the idea that it is not only a book which was once spoken, but a book which is *now speaking*. The prophets habitually said, “Thus says the Lord” (for example, Exod 4:22, Jer 6:9, Zech 8:23). They meant their hearers to understand that God’s speaking is in the continuous present. We may use the past tense properly to indicate that at a certain time a certain word of God was spoken, but a word of God once spoken continues

2 Infallible – Unable to fail.

to be spoken, as a child once born continues to be alive, or a world once created continues to exist. And those are but imperfect illustrations, for children die and worlds burn out, but the word of our God endures forever.

If you would follow on to know the Lord, come at once to the open Bible expecting it to speak to you. Do not come with the notion that it is a *thing* which you may push around at your convenience. It is more than a thing, it is a voice, a word, the very word of the living God.

Prayer

Lord, teach me to listen. The times are noisy and my ears are weary with the thousand raucous sounds which continuously assault them. Give me the spirit of the boy Samuel when he said to you, "Speak, for your servant hears." Let me hear you speaking in my heart. Let me get used to the sound of your voice, that its tones may be familiar when the sounds of earth die away and the only sound will be the music of your speaking voice. Amen.

Discussion Questions



What are the characteristics of contemporary life that make it challenging to hear God's speaking voice?



God, who is everywhere a present reality, is also continuously articulate. He is here, and he is not silent. His communications are not restricted to words conveyed long ago, for his voice is alive and in the present tense. How should this truth affect our reverent approach to Holy Scripture?



God is continually speaking, not only to Christians, but indeed to all his human creatures. How should this fact shape our evangelistic endeavors and conversations with non-Christians?



Tozer suggests that Christians must learn the unfamiliar discipline of listening for God's voice, of being still in order to know. What are some practical strategies we might adopt in order to become more attentive listeners?



One of the great challenges of the Christian life is to be able to discern the authentic voice of God amid all the noise and impressions we receive. Tozer reminds us that the Old Testament saints often recognized God's voice as a voice of wisdom. He adds that the voice of God is typically a "friendly" one. How might these two insights aid us in our discernment?



Chapter 6

The Gaze of the Soul

Faith is much more than mere intellectual assent to certain truth claims. It is the continuous, trusting gaze of a soul upon a saving God. Such inward beholding looks out instead of in whenever it is properly practiced in this self-forgetful way and the Christian's whole life falls into line. The reciprocal gaze, lovingly back and forth, between God and the attentive believer becomes a relational foretaste of heaven itself. It is less a mental technique and more a tone and disposition to be sustained throughout our daily tasks.

*Looking unto Jesus, the author and
finisher of our faith. ~ Hebrews 12:2*

Let us think of our intelligent plain man or woman mentioned in chapter five coming for the first time to

the reading of the Scriptures. They approach the Bible without any previous knowledge of what it contains. They are wholly without prejudice; they have nothing to prove and nothing to defend.

Such persons will not have read long until their mind begins to observe certain truths standing out from the page. They are the spiritual principles behind the record of God's dealings with humanity, and woven into the writings of holy authors as they "were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21) As they read on, they might want to number these truths as they become clear to them and make a brief summary under each number. These summaries will be the tenets of their biblical creed. Further reading will not affect these points except to enlarge and strengthen them. Our man or woman is finding out what the Bible actually teaches.

High up on the list of things which the Bible teaches will be the doctrine of *faith*. The place of weighty importance which the Bible gives to faith will be too plain for them to miss. They will very likely conclude: faith is all-important in the life of the soul. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith will get me anything, take me anywhere in the kingdom of God, but without faith there can be no approach to God, no forgiveness, no deliverance, no salvation, no communion, no spiritual life at all.

By the time our friend has reached the eleventh chapter of Hebrews the eloquent tribute which is there pronounced upon faith will not seem strange to them. They will have read Paul's powerful defense of faith in his Roman and Galatian epistles. Later if they go on to study church history, they will understand the amazing power in the teachings

of the Reformers as they showed the central place of faith in the Christian religion.

Now if faith is so vitally important, if it is an indispensable *must* in our pursuit of God, it is perfectly natural that we should be deeply concerned over whether or not we possess this most precious gift. And our minds being what they are, it is inevitable that sooner or later we should get around to inquiring after the nature of faith. “What is faith?” would lie close to the question, “Do I *have* faith?” and would demand an answer if it were anywhere to be found.

Almost all who preach or write on the subject of faith have much the same things to say concerning it. They tell us that it is believing a promise, that it is taking God at his word, that it is reckoning the Bible to be true and stepping out upon it. The rest of the book or sermon is usually taken up with stories of persons who have had their prayers answered as a result of their faith. These answers are mostly direct gifts of a practical and temporal nature such as health, money, physical protection or success in business. Or if the teacher is of a philosophic turn of mind, he or she may take another course and lose us in a tsunami of metaphysics, or snow us under with psychological jargon as they define and redefine, paring the slender hair of faith thinner and thinner till it disappears in gossamer* shavings at last. When they are finished, we get up disappointed and go out “by that same door wherein we went.”¹ Surely there must be something better than this.

1 Allusion to Edward Fitzgerald, trans., “The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam,” in Charles W. Eliot, ed., *The Harvard Classics*, vol. 41 (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910), 943–58.

In the Scriptures there is practically no effort made to define faith. Outside of a brief fourteen-word definition in Hebrews 11:1,² I know of no biblical definition, and even here faith is defined functionally, not philosophically; that is, it is a statement of what faith is *in operation*, not what it is *in essence*. It assumes the presence of faith and shows what it results in, rather than what it is. We will be wise to go just that far and attempt to go no further. We are told from whence it comes and by what means: “Faith is a gift of God,” and “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” This much is clear, and, to paraphrase Thomas à Kempis,* “I would rather exercise faith than know the definition of it.”³

From here on, when the words “faith is” or their equivalent occur in this chapter I ask that they be understood to refer to what faith is in operation as exercised by a believing person. Right here we drop the notion of definition and think about faith as it may be experienced in action. The complexion of our thoughts will be practical, not theoretical.

In a dramatic story in the book of Numbers faith is seen in action. Israel became discouraged and spoke against God, and the Lord sent venomous snakes among them. “And they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died” (Num 21:6). Then Moses sought the Lord for them and he heard and gave them a remedy against the bite of the snakes. He commanded Moses to make a snake of brass and put it upon a pole in sight of all the people, “and it

2 “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (ESV).

3 Tozer appears to be paraphrasing the main idea of *The Imitation of Christ* (1471), book 1, chapter 3.

shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” Moses obeyed, “and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived” (Num 21:8–9).

In the New Testament this important bit of history is interpreted for us by no less an authority than our Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is explaining to his hearers how they may be saved. He tells them that it is by believing. Then to make it clear he refers to this incident in the book of Numbers. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14–15).

Our plain man or woman in reading this would make an important discovery. They would notice that “look” and “believe” are synonymous terms. “Looking” on the Old Testament serpent is identical with “believing” on the New Testament Christ. That is, the *looking* and the *believing* are the same thing. And they would understand that while Israel looked with their external eyes, believing is done with the heart. I think they would conclude that *faith is the gaze of a soul upon a saving God*.

When they have seen this, they would remember passages they had read before, and their meaning would come flooding over them. “They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed” (Ps 34:5). “Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us” (Ps 123:1–2). Here those seeking mercy look straight at

the God of mercy and never take their eyes away from him until mercy is granted. And our Lord himself looked always at God. “Looking up to heaven, he blessed, and broke, and gave the bread to his disciples” (Matt 14:19). Indeed, Jesus taught that he wrought his works by always keeping his inward eyes upon his Father. His power lay in his continuous look at God (John 5:19–21).

In full accord with the few texts that we have quoted is the whole tenor of the inspired Word. It is summed up for us in the Hebrew epistle when we are instructed to run life’s race “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2). From all this we learn that faith is not a once-done act, but a continuous gaze of the heart at the Triune God.

Believing, then, is directing the heart’s attention to Jesus. It is lifting the mind to “behold the Lamb of God,” and never ceasing that beholding for the rest of our lives (*John* 1:29). At first this may be difficult, but it becomes easier as we look steadily at his wondrous person, quietly and without strain. Distractions may hinder, but once the heart is committed to him, after each brief excursion away from him the attention will return again and rest upon him like a wandering bird coming back to its window.

I would emphasize this one commitment, this one great volitional act which establishes the heart’s intention to gaze forever upon Jesus. God takes this intention for our choice and makes what allowances he must for the thousand distractions which beset us in this evil world. He knows that we have set the direction of our hearts toward Jesus, and we can know it too, and comfort ourselves with the knowledge that a habit of soul is forming which will

become after a while a sort of spiritual reflex requiring no more conscious effort on our part.

Faith is the least self-regarding of the virtues. It is by its very nature scarcely conscious of its own existence. Like the eye which sees everything in front of it and never sees itself, faith is occupied with the object upon which it rests and pays no attention to itself at all. While we are looking at God, we do not see ourselves—blessed riddance. The person who has struggled to purify themselves and has had nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when they stop tinkering with their soul and look away to the perfect one. While they look at Christ the very things that they have so long been trying to do will be getting done within them. It will be God working in them to will and to do.

Faith is not in itself a meritorious act; the merit is in the one toward whom it is directed. Faith is a redirecting of our sight, a getting out of the focus of our own vision and getting God into focus. Sin has twisted our vision inward and made it self-regarding. Unbelief has put self where God should be, and is perilously close to the sin of Lucifer who said, “I will set my throne above the throne of God” (*Isa 14:13*). Faith looks *out* instead of *in* and the whole life falls into line.

All this may seem too simple. But we have no apology to make. To those who would seek to climb into heaven after help or descend into hell God says, “The word is near you . . . that is, the word of faith” (*Rom 10:8*). The word induces us to lift up our eyes unto the Lord and the blessed work of faith begins.

When we lift our inward eyes to gaze upon God, we are sure to meet friendly eyes gazing back at us, for it is written that the eyes of the Lord range throughout all the earth. The sweet language of experience is “You are the God who sees me” (Gen 16:13, NIV). When the eyes of the soul looking out meet the eyes of God looking in, heaven has begun right here on this earth.

When all my striving⁴ is turned only toward you because all yours is turned toward me, when I give all my attention only to you and never remove my mind’s eyes because you hold me in your constant vision, and when I direct my love to you alone because you, who are love, are turned toward me alone. And what, Lord, is my life, except that embrace in which the sweetness of your love so lovingly holds me!⁵

So wrote Nicholas of Cusa⁶ hundreds of years ago. I should like to say more about this old man of God. He is not much known today anywhere among Christian believers, and among current Fundamentalists⁷ he is known not at all. I feel that we could gain much from a little acquaintance with men and women of his spiritual flavor and the school of Christian thought which they represent. Christian literature, to be accepted and approved by the evangelical

4 Striving – Effort, endeavor.

5 Nicholas of Cusa, *On the Vision of God*, in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, translated by H. Lawrence Bond, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1997), 240.

6 Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) – A favorite of Tozer’s who was a wide-ranging medieval scholar, a busy church statesman, and above all an eloquent mystic whose heart was captured by his vision of God in Christ.

7 Fundamentalists – Very conservative Protestants.

leaders of our times, must follow very closely the same train of thought, a kind of “party line” from which it is scarcely safe to depart. A half century of this in America has made us smug and content. We imitate each other with slavish devotion and our most strenuous efforts are put forth to try to say the same thing that everyone around us is saying—and yet to find an excuse for saying it, some little safe variation on the approved theme or, if no more, at least a new illustration.

Nicholas* was a true follower of Christ, a lover of the Lord, radiant and shining in his devotion to the person of Jesus. His theology was orthodox, but fragrant and sweet as everything about Jesus might properly be expected to be. His conception of eternal life, for instance, is beautiful in itself and, if I mistake not, is nearer in spirit to John 17:3 than that which is current among us today. Life eternal, says Nicholas*, is

Nothing other than the blessed vision by which you never [stop] regarding me most lovingly even to the innermost places of my soul. Your seeing is nothing other than your bringing to life, nothing other than your continuously imparting your sweetest love. And through this imparting of love, your seeing [of me] inflames me to the love of you, and through inflaming feeds me, and through feeding kindles my desires, and through kindling [causes] me to drink of the dew of gladness, and through drinking infuses a fountain of life within me, and by infusing causes [it] to increase and to endure.⁸

8 Nicholas of Cusa, *On the Vision of God*, 240.

Now, if faith is the gaze of the heart at God, and if this gaze is but the raising of the inward eyes to meet the all-seeing eyes of God, then it follows that it is one of the easiest things possible to do. It would be like God to make the most vital thing easy and place it within the range of possibility for the weakest and poorest of us.

Several conclusions may fairly be drawn from all this. The simplicity of it, for instance. Since believing is looking, it can be done without special equipment or religious apparatus. God has seen to it that the one life-and-death essential can never be subject to random accidents. Equipment can break down or get lost, water can leak away, records can be destroyed by fire, the minister can be delayed or the church burn down. All these are external to the soul and are subject to accident or mechanical failure: but *looking* is of the heart and can be done successfully by anyone standing up or kneeling down or lying in their last agony a thousand miles from any church.

Since believing is looking it can be done *any time*. No season is superior to another season for this sweetest of all acts. God never made salvation depend upon new moons nor holy days or sabbaths (Col 2:16; Rom 14:5–8). No one is nearer to Christ on Easter Sunday than they are, say, on Saturday, August 3, or Monday, October 4. As long as Christ sits on the mediatorial throne every day is a good day and all days are days of salvation.

Neither does *place* matter in this blessed work of believing God. Lift your heart and let it rest upon Jesus and you are instantly in a sanctuary though it be a passenger train or a factory or a kitchen. You can see God from anywhere if your mind is set to love and obey him.

Now, someone may ask, “Is not this of which you speak for special persons such as monks or ministers who have by the nature of their calling more time to devote to quiet meditation? I am a busy worker and have little time to spend alone.” I am happy to say that the life I describe is for everyone of God’s children regardless of calling. It is, in fact, happily practiced every day by many hardworking persons and is beyond the reach of none.

Many have found the secret of which I speak and, without giving much thought to what is going on within them, constantly practice this habit of inwardly gazing upon God. They know that something inside their hearts sees God. Even when they are compelled to withdraw their conscious attention in order to engage in earthly affairs there is within them a secret communion always going on. Let their attention but be released for a moment from necessary business and it flies at once to God again. This has been the testimony of many Christians, so many that even as I state it thus, I have a feeling that I am quoting, though from whom or from how many I cannot possibly know.

I do not want to leave the impression that the ordinary means of grace have no value. They most assuredly have. Private prayer should be practiced by every Christian. Long periods of Bible meditation will purify our gaze and direct it; church attendance will enlarge our outlook and increase our love for others. Service and work and activity; all are good and should be engaged in by every Christian. But at the bottom of all these things, giving meaning to them, will be the inward habit of beholding God. A new set of eyes (so to speak) will develop within us

enabling us to be looking at God while our outward eyes are seeing the scenes of this passing world.

Someone may fear that we are magnifying private religion out of all proportion, that the “us” of the New Testament is being displaced by a selfish “I.” Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork⁹ are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So, one hundred worshipers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become “unity” conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship. Social religion is perfected when private religion is purified. The body becomes stronger as its members become healthier. The whole church of God gains when the members that compose it begin to seek a better and a higher life.

Social religion is perfected when private religion is purified.

All the foregoing presupposes true repentance and a full commitment of the life to God. It is hardly necessary to mention this, for only persons who have made such a commitment will have read this far.

When the habit of inwardly gazing Godward becomes fixed within us we shall be ushered onto a new level of spiritual life more in keeping with the promises of God and the mood of the New Testament. The Triune God will

9 Fork – A tuning fork, used as a reliable standard for sound.

be our dwelling place even while our feet walk the low road of simple duty here among our fellow human beings. We will have found life's *summum bonum*¹⁰ indeed.

Here is the source of all the delights that can be desired. Nothing better can be thought by any human being or angel, and nothing better can exist by any mode of being, for this source is the absolute [maximum], unable to be greater, of every rational desire.¹¹

Prayer

O Lord, I have heard a good word inviting me to look away to you and be satisfied. My heart longs to respond, but sin has clouded my vision until I see you but dimly. Be pleased to cleanse me in your own precious blood, and make me inwardly pure, so that I may with unveiled eyes gaze upon you all the days of my earthly pilgrimage. Then shall I be prepared to behold you in full splendor in the day when you shall appear to be glorified in your saints and admired in all those who believe. Amen.

¹⁰ *Summum bonum* – Latin phrase meaning “supreme good.”

¹¹ Nicholas of Cusa, *On the Vision of God*, 240.

Discussion Questions



Capitalism and naturalistic evolution, two of the most powerful ideologies shaping Western contemporary culture, both affirm individual self-interest and “the survival of the fittest.” How is Tozer’s vision a strong countercultural alternative to these ideologies?



Tozer describes faith as “the [continuous] gaze of a soul upon a saving God.” How does such an understanding go beyond conventional views of faith? What are some potential spiritual benefits of reframing faith this way?



Inward beholding always “looks out instead of in.” The result, says Tozer, is that “the whole life falls into line.” Discuss the transforming potential of such a self-forgetful orientation to life. Are you drawn emotionally to the suggestion that the reciprocating gaze between God and the attentive believer is a relational foretaste of heaven? Explain.



Such inward gazing, says Tozer, can be done anytime and anywhere, and by ordinary Christians. But obviously, Christians still need to give their full attention to their employment and tasks at work. Discuss how such inward gazing is less a mental technique and more a tone and disposition to be sustained throughout the day.



Tozer claims that harmonious unity among believers is actually enhanced when individual Christians practice this inward gazing upon God in Christ. Do you find his argument persuasive? Why?



THEOLOGY & ETHICS



Chapter 7

Restoring the Creator-Creature Relationship

We live in a secular society in which God is largely ignored. Yet everything in nature depends upon right relationships amongst its varied members. Foremost in significance is the restoration of a harmonious and life-giving relationship between the Creator and his human creatures. This must be a properly ordered relationship, however, in which we continually acknowledge and honor the Creator's rightful preeminence. Far from diminishing human dignity, such voluntary submission on our part restores our human dignity and increases our human flourishing.

*Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth. ~ Psalm 57:5*

It is self-evident that order in nature depends upon right relationships; to achieve harmony each thing must be in its proper position relative to each other thing. In human life it is not otherwise.

I have hinted before in these chapters that the cause of all our human miseries is a radical moral dislocation, an upset in our relation to God and to each other. For whatever else the fall may have been, it was most certainly a sharp change in humanity's relation to their Creator. They adopted toward God an altered attitude, and by so doing destroyed the proper Creator-creature relation in which, unknown to them, their true happiness lay. Essentially salvation is the restoration of a right relation between human beings and their Creator, a bringing back to normal of the Creator-creature relation.

A satisfactory spiritual life will begin with a complete change in relation between God and the sinner; not a judicial change merely, but a conscious and experienced change affecting the sinner's whole nature. The atonement in Jesus's blood makes such a change judicially possible and the working of the Holy Spirit makes it emotionally satisfying. The story of the prodigal son perfectly illustrates this latter phase (Luke 15:11–32). He had brought a world of trouble upon himself by forsaking the position which he had properly held as son of his father. At bottom his restoration was nothing more than a reestablishing of the father-son relation which had existed from his birth and had been altered temporarily by his act of sinful rebellion. This story overlooks the legal aspects of redemption, but it makes beautifully clear the experiential aspects of salvation.

In determining relationships, we must begin somewhere. There must be somewhere a fixed center against which everything else is measured, where the law of relativity does not enter and we can say “IS” and make no allowances. Such a center is God. When God would make his name known to humankind, he could find no better word than “I AM” (Exod 3:14). When he speaks in the first person he says, “I AM”; when we speak of him, we say, “He is”; when we speak to him, we say, “You are.” Everyone and everything else measures from that fixed point. “I am that I am,” says God, “I change not.”

As the sailor locates his position on the sea by “shooting” the sun, so we may get our moral bearings by looking at God. We must begin with God. We are right when and only when we stand in a right position relative to God, and we are wrong so far and so long as we stand in any other position.

Much of our difficulty as seeking Christians stems from our unwillingness to take God as he is and adjust our lives accordingly. We insist upon trying to modify him and to bring him nearer to our own image. The flesh whimpers against the rigor of God’s inexorable sentence and begs like Agag for a little mercy, a little indulgence of its carnal ways (1 Sam 15).¹ It is no use. We can get a right start only by accepting God as he is and learning to love him for what he is. As we go on to know him better, we shall find it a source of unspeakable joy that God is just what he is. Some of the most rapturous moments we know will be those we spend in reverent admiration of the

1 King Saul of Israel is censured by the prophet Samuel for showing mercy to Agag, a captured enemy leader.



Godhead*. In those holy moments the very thought of change in him will be too painful to endure.

So let us begin with God. Back of all, above all, before all is God; first in sequential order, above in rank and station, exalted in dignity and honor. As the self-existent One he gave being to all things, and all things exist out of him and for him. "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for you have created all things, and for your pleasure they are and were created" (Rev 4:11, KJV).

Every soul belongs to God and exists by his pleasure. God being who and what he is, and we being who and what we are, the only thinkable relation between us is one of full lordship on his part and complete submission on ours. We owe him every honor that it is in our power to give him. Our everlasting grief lies in giving him anything less.

The pursuit of God will embrace the labor of bringing our total personality into conformity to his. And this not judicially, but actually. I do not here refer to the act of justification by faith in Christ. I speak of a voluntary exalting of God to his proper station over us and a willing surrender of our whole being to the place of worshipful submission which the Creator-creature circumstance makes proper.

The moment we make up our minds that we are going on with this determination to exalt God over all we step out of the world's parade. We shall find ourselves out of adjustment to the ways of the world, and increasingly so as we make progress in the holy way. We shall acquire a new viewpoint; a new and different psychology will be formed within us; a new power will begin to surprise us by its upsurgings and its outgoings.

Our break with the world will be the direct outcome of our changed relation to God. For the world of fallen human beings does not honor God. Millions call themselves by his name, it is true, and pay some token respect to him, but a simple test will show how little he is really honored among them. Let the average person be put to the proof on the question of who is *above*, and their true position will be exposed. Let them be forced into making a choice between God and money, between God and other humans, between God and personal ambition, God and self, God and human love, and God will take second place every time. Those other things will be exalted above. However, the person may protest, the proof is in the choices they make day after day throughout their life.

“You be exalted” is the language of victorious spiritual experience. It is a little key to unlock the door to great treasures of grace. It is central in the life of God in the soul. Let the seeking person reach a place where life and lips join to say continually, “You be exalted,” and a thousand minor problems will be solved at once. Their Christian life ceases to be the complicated thing it had been before and becomes the very essence of simplicity. By the exercise of their will they have set their course, and on that course they will stay as if guided by an automatic pilot. If blown off course for a moment by some adverse wind they will surely return again as by a secret bent of the soul. The hidden motions of the Spirit are working in their favor, and “the stars from their courses” fight for them (Judg 5:20). They have met their life problem at its center, and everything else must follow along.

Let no one imagine that they will lose anything of human dignity by this voluntary sell-out of their all to their God. They do not by this degrade themselves as a person; rather, they find their right place of high honor as one made in the image of their creator. Their deep disgrace lay in their moral derangement, their unnatural usurpation of the place of God. Their honor will be proved by restoring again that stolen throne. In exalting God over all they find their own highest honor upheld.

Anyone who might feel reluctant to surrender their will to the will of another should remember Jesus's words, "Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). We must of necessity be servant to someone, either to God or to sin. Sinners pride themselves on their independence, completely overlooking the fact that they are weak slaves of the sins that rule their members. The person who surrenders to Christ exchanges a cruel slave driver for a kind and gentle master whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light (Matt 11:28–30).

Made as we were in the image of God, we scarcely find it strange to take again our God as our All. God was our original habitat and our hearts cannot but feel at home when they enter again that ancient and beautiful abode.

I hope it is clear that there is a logic behind God's claim to preeminence. That place is his by every right in earth or heaven. While we take to ourselves the place that is his, the whole course of our lives is out of joint. Nothing will or can restore order till our hearts make the great decision: God shall be exalted above.

“Those who honor Me I will honor,” said God once to a priest of Israel, and that ancient law of the kingdom stands today unchanged by the passing of time or the changes of dispensation (1 Sam 2:30). The whole Bible and every page of history proclaim the perpetuation of that law. “My Father will honor the one who serves me,” said our Lord Jesus, tying in the old with the new and revealing the essential unity of his ways with people (John 12:26, NIV).

Sometimes the best way to see a thing is to look at its opposite. Eli and his sons are placed in the priesthood with the stipulation that they honor God in their lives and ministrations. This they fail to do, and God sends Samuel to announce the consequences. Unknown to Eli this law of reciprocal honor has been all the while secretly working, and now the time has come for judgment to fall. Hophni and Phineas, the degenerate priests, fall in battle, the wife of Hophni dies in childbirth, Israel flees before her enemies, the ark of God is captured by the Philistines, and the old man Eli falls backward and dies of a broken neck. Thus, stark utter tragedy followed upon Eli’s failure to honor God (1 Sam 2–3).

Now set over against this almost any Bible character who honestly tried to glorify God in their earthly walk. See how God overlooked weaknesses and failures as he poured upon his servants grace and blessing untold. Let it be Abraham, Jacob, David, Daniel, Elijah, or whom you will; honor followed honor as harvest the seed. The men and women of God set their hearts to exalt God above all; God accepted their intentions as fact and acted accordingly. Not perfection, but holy intention made the difference.

In our Lord Jesus Christ this law was seen in simple perfection. In his lowly manhood he humbled himself and gladly gave all glory to his Father in heaven. He sought not his own honor, but the honor of God who sent him. “If I honor Myself,” he said on one occasion, “My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me” (John 8:54). So far had the proud Pharisees departed from this law that they could not understand one who honored God at his own expense. “I honor My Father,” said Jesus to them, “and you dishonor Me” (John 8:49).

Another saying of Jesus, and a most disturbing one, was put in the form of a question, “How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?” (John 5:44). If I understand this correctly, Christ taught here the alarming doctrine that the desire for honor among fellow humans made belief impossible. Is this sin at the root of religious unbelief? Could it be that those “intellectual difficulties” which people blame for their inability to believe are but smoke screens to conceal the real cause that lies behind them? Was it this greedy desire for honor from others that made men into Pharisees and Pharisees into deicides?² Is this the secret back of religious self-righteousness and empty worship? I believe it may be. The whole course of the life is upset by failure to put God where he belongs. We exalt ourselves instead of God, and the curse follows.

In our desire after God let us keep always in mind that God also has desire, and his desire is toward people, and more particularly toward those people who will make

2 Deicides – God-killers.

the once-for-all decision to exalt him over all. Such as these are precious to God above all treasures of earth or sea. In them God finds a theater where he can display his exceeding kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. With them God can walk unhindered, toward them he can act like the God he is.

In speaking thus, I have one fear; it is that I may convince the mind before God can win the heart. For this God-above-all position is one not easy to take. The mind may approve it while not having the consent of the will to put it into effect. While the imagination races ahead to honor God, the will may lag behind and the individual never guess how divided their heart is. The whole person must make the decision before the heart can know any real satisfaction. God wants us all, and he will not rest till he gets us all. No part of the person will do.

Let us pray over this in detail, throwing ourselves at God's feet and meaning everything we say. No one who prays thus in sincerity need wait long for tokens of divine acceptance. God will unveil his glory before his servant's eyes, and he will place all his treasures at the disposal of such a one, for he knows that his honor is safe in such consecrated hands.

Prayer

O God, be exalted over my possessions. Nothing of earth's treasures shall seem dear to me if only you are glorified in my life. You be exalted over my friendships. I am determined that you shall be above all, though I must stand deserted and alone in the midst of the earth. You be exalted above my comforts. Though it may mean the loss of bodily comforts and the carrying of heavy crosses

I shall keep my vow made this day before you. Be exalted over my reputation. Make me ambitious to please you even if as a result I must sink into obscurity and my name be forgotten as a dream. Rise, O Lord, into your proper place of honor, above my ambitions, above my likes and dislikes, above my family, my health and even my life itself. Let me decrease that you may increase, let me sink that you may rise above. Ride forth upon me as you rode into Jerusalem mounted upon the humble little beast, a colt, the foal of a donkey, and let me hear the children cry to you, “Hosanna in the highest.”

Discussion Questions



Secularization, the process whereby God is progressively ignored and pushed away to the distant margins of human life, has been trending in many societies worldwide. Discuss the varied effects of such a widening relational divide between God and God's human creatures in our world today?



The Scriptures teach us to regard God as our father and our friend, and they raise the possibility of lovingly intimate relationship with him. Tozer reminds us that such relationships must be properly ordered ones in which the Creator's rightful preeminence is acknowledged and honored. Describe the unique dynamics of such a relationship, given the extreme difference between an all-powerful, eternal Creator and his very tiny, mortal human creatures.



What negative perceptions of God's nature and character make some people cool toward God and reluctant to pursue him or get too close to him? What corrective wisdom about God can help overcome such mental and emotional obstacles to loving intimacy with him? Are there any misperceptions of God that you are still working personally to overcome?



Tozer insists that an essential preparation for any healthy, life-giving relationship with God is complete surrender on the Christian's part, followed by ongoing worshipful submission to God and God's will. As we have already noted, this relationship is not one between equals. How can Christians prevent themselves from regressing into selfish ambition or any other unhealthy life orientation that might cause this relationship to deteriorate?



The Christian life has a private side as well as a communal dimension. We have private devotions, but we also need to participate in congregational life and worship. What communal practices and habits can help Christians maintain properly-ordered, life-giving relationships with their Creator God? Of these practices and habits, which do you think will be most valuable for you personally?



THEOLOGY & ETHICS



Chapter 8

Meekness and Rest in the Sacrament of Living

Jesus commended meekness as the secret to soul rest. It is not weakness or timidity, but it is the opposite of pride and pretense. A purified desire to be pleasing to God alone replaces the tyrannical need to impress others and win their approval. Separating everything into sacred and secular spheres leads to a divided life, and to a misguided disdain for the ordinary dimensions of our lives. Instead, we are to do everything to the glory of God. Therefore, we should view each humble little aspect of our lives sacramentally—that is, as a sacred opportunity for God’s presence and inward grace to shine out.

Meekness and Rest

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall
inherit the earth. ~ Matthew 5:5*

A fairly accurate description of the human race might be furnished to one unacquainted with it by taking the Beatitudes, turning them wrong side out and saying, “Here is your human race.” For the exact opposite of the virtues in the Beatitudes are the very qualities which distinguish human life and conduct.

In the world of humanity, we find nothing approaching the virtues of which Jesus spoke in the opening words of the famous Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7). Instead of poverty of spirit we find the most offensive kind of pride; instead of mourners we find pleasure-seekers; instead of meekness, arrogance; instead of hunger after righteousness we hear people saying, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing”; instead of mercy we find cruelty; instead of purity of heart, corrupt imaginings; instead of peacemakers we find people quarrelsome and resentful; instead of rejoicing in mistreatment we find them fighting back with every weapon at their command.

Of this kind of moral stuff civilized society is composed. The atmosphere is charged with it; we breathe it with every breath and drink it with our mother’s milk. Culture and education refine these things slightly but leave them basically untouched. A whole world of literature has been created to justify this kind of life as the only normal one. And this is the more to be wondered at seeing that these are the evils which make life the bitter struggle it is for all

of us. All our heartaches and a great many of our physical ills spring directly out of our sins. Pride, arrogance, resentfulness, evil imaginings, malice, greed: these are the sources of more human pain than all the diseases that have ever afflicted mortal flesh.

Into a world like this the sound of Jesus's words comes wonderful and strange, a visitation from above. It is well that he spoke, for no one else could have done it as well; and it is good that we listen. His words are the essence of truth. He is not offering an opinion; Jesus never uttered opinions. He never guessed; he knew, and he knows. His words are not as Solomon's were, the sum of sound wisdom or the results of keen observation. He spoke out of the fullness of his Godhead*, and his words are very truth itself. He is the only one who could say "blessed" with complete authority, for he is the Blessed One come from the world above to confer blessedness upon humankind. And his words were supported by deeds mightier than any performed on this earth by any other person. It is wisdom for us to listen.

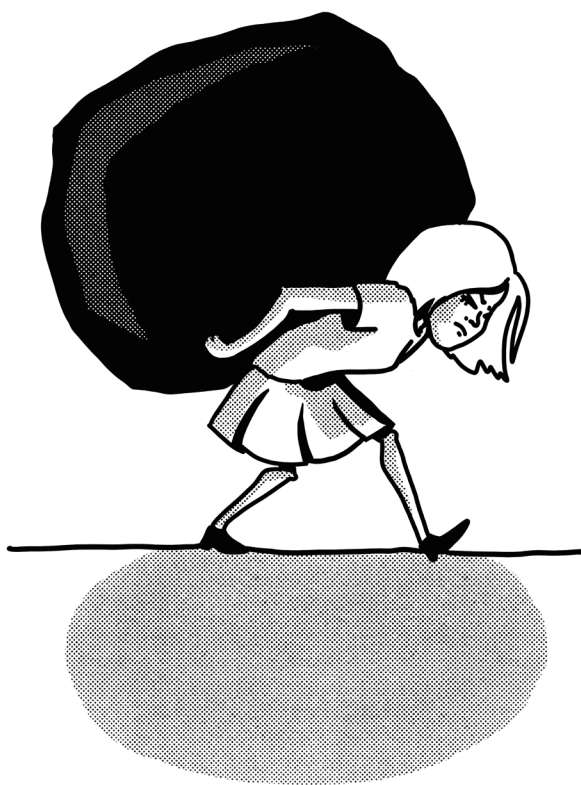
As was often so with Jesus, he used this word "meek" in a brief crisp sentence, and not until sometime later did he go on to explain it. In the same book of Matthew, he tells us more about it and applies it to our lives. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matt 11:28–30). Here we have two things standing in contrast to each other, a burden and a rest. The burden is not a local one, peculiar to those first hearers, but one which is borne by the whole human race. It consists not of political

oppression or poverty or hard work. It is far deeper than that. It is felt by the rich as well as the poor for it is something from which wealth and idleness can never deliver us.

The burden borne by humankind is a heavy and a crushing thing. The word Jesus used means a load carried or toil borne to the point of exhaustion. Rest is simply release from that burden. It is not something we do, it is what comes to us when we cease to do. His own meekness, that is the rest.

Let us examine our burden. It is altogether an interior one. It attacks the heart and the mind and reaches the body only from within. First, there is the burden of *pride*. The labor of self-love is a heavy one indeed. Think for yourself whether much of your sorrow has not arisen from someone speaking slightly of you. As long as you set yourself up as a little god to which you must be loyal there will be those who will delight to offer affront to your idol. How then can you hope to have inward peace? The heart's fierce effort to protect itself from every slight, to shield its touchy honor from the bad opinion of friend and enemy, will never let the mind have rest. Continue this fight through the years and the burden will become intolerable. Yet the children of earth are carrying this burden continually, challenging every word spoken against them, cringing under every criticism, smarting under each fancied slight, tossing sleepless if another is preferred before them.

Such a burden as this is not necessary to bear. Jesus calls us to his rest, and meekness is his method. The meek person cares not at all who is greater than them, for they have long



ago decided that the esteem of the world is not worth the effort. They develop toward themselves a kindly sense of humor and learn to say, "Oh, so you have been overlooked? They have placed someone else before you? They have whispered that you are pretty small stuff after all? And now you feel hurt because the world is saying about you the very things you have been saying about yourself? Only yesterday you were telling God that you were nothing, a mere worm of the dust. Where is your consistency? Come on, humble yourself, and cease to care what people think."

Meek persons are not human mice afflicted with a sense of their own inferiority. Rather, they may be in their moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but they have stopped being fooled about themselves. They have accepted God's estimate of their own life. They know they are as weak and helpless as God has declared them to be, but paradoxically, they know at the same time that they are in the sight of God of more importance than angels. In themselves, nothing; in God, everything. That is their motto. They know well that the world will never see them as God sees them and they have stopped caring. They rest perfectly content to allow God to place his own values. They will be patient to wait for the day when everything will get its own price tag and real worth will come into its own. Then the righteous shall shine forth in the kingdom of their Father. They are willing to wait for that day.

In the meantime, they will have attained a place of soul rest. As they walk on in meekness, they will be happy to let God defend them. The old struggle to defend themselves is over. They have found the peace which meekness brings.

Then also they will get deliverance from the burden of *pretense*. By this I mean not hypocrisy, but the common human desire to put the best foot forward and hide from the world our real inward poverty. For sin has played many evil tricks upon us, and one has been the infusing into us of a false sense of shame. There is hardly a man or woman who dares to be just what he or she is without doctoring up the impression. The fear of being found out gnaws like rodents within their hearts. The person of culture is haunted by the fear that they will someday come upon someone more cultured than themselves. The learned person fears to meet a person more learned than they. The rich man or woman sweats under the fear that their clothes or their car or their house will sometime be made to look cheap by comparison with those of another rich person. So-called “society” runs by a motivation not higher than this, and the poorer classes on their level are little better.

Let no one smile this off. These burdens are real, and little by little they kill the victims of this evil and unnatural way of life. And the psychology created by years of this kind of thing makes true meekness seem as unreal as a dream, as aloof as a star. To all the victims of the gnawing disease Jesus says, “You must become like little children” (*Matt 18:3*). For little children do not compare; they receive direct enjoyment from what they have without relating it to something else or someone else. Only as they get older and sin begins to stir within their hearts do jealousy and envy appear. Then they are unable to enjoy what they have if someone else has something larger or better. At that early age does the galling burden come down upon

their tender souls, and it never leaves them till Jesus sets them free.

Another source of burden is *artificiality*. I am sure that most people live in secret fear that someday they will be careless and by chance an enemy or friend will be allowed to peep into their poor empty souls. So, they are never relaxed. Bright people are tense and alert in fear that they may be trapped into saying something common or stupid. Traveled people are afraid that they may meet some Marco Polo who is able to describe some remote place where they have never been.

This unnatural condition is part of our sad heritage of sin, but in our day it is aggravated by our whole way of life. Advertising is largely based upon this habit of pretense. "Courses" are offered in this or that field of human learning frankly appealing to the victim's desire to shine at a party. Books are sold, clothes and cosmetics are peddled, by playing continually upon this desire to appear what we are not. Artificiality is one curse that will drop away the moment we kneel at Jesus's feet and surrender ourselves to his meekness. Then we will not care what people think of us so long as God is pleased. Then *what we are* will be everything; what we appear will take its place far down the scale of interest for us. Apart from sin we have nothing of which to be ashamed. Only an evil desire to shine makes us want to appear other than we are.

The heart of the world is breaking under this load of pride and pretense. There is no release from our burden apart from the meekness of Christ. Good keen reasoning may help slightly, but so strong is this vice that if we push it down one place it will come up somewhere else. To men

and women everywhere Jesus says, “Come to me, and I will give you rest” (*Matt 11:28*). The rest he offers is the rest of meekness, the blessed relief which comes when we accept ourselves for what we are and cease to pretend. It will take some courage at first, but the needed grace will come as we learn that we are sharing this new and easy yoke with the strong Son of God himself. He calls it “my yoke,” and he walks at one end while we walk at the other.

Prayer

Lord, make me childlike. Deliver me from the urge to compete with another for place or prestige or position. I desire to be simple and artless as a little child. Deliver me from pose and pretense. Forgive me for thinking of myself. Help me to forget myself and find my true peace in beholding you. That you may answer this prayer I humble myself before you. Lay upon me your easy yoke of self-forgetfulness that through it I may find rest. Amen.

The Sacrament of Living

*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,
do all to the glory of God. ~ 1 Corinthians 10:31*

One of the greatest hindrances to internal peace which the Christian encounters is the common habit of dividing our lives into two areas, the sacred and the secular. As these areas are conceived to exist apart from each other and to be morally and spiritually incompatible, and as we are compelled by the necessities of living to be always

crossing back and forth from the one to the other, our inner lives tend to break up so that we live a divided instead of a unified life.

Our trouble springs from the fact that we who follow Christ inhabit at once two worlds, the spiritual and the natural. As children of Adam and Eve we live our lives on earth subject to the limitations of the flesh and the weaknesses and ills to which human nature is heir. Merely to live among people requires of us years of hard toil and much care and attention to the things of this world. In sharp contrast to this is our life in the Spirit. There we enjoy another and higher kind of life; we are children of God; we possess heavenly status and enjoy intimate fellowship with Christ.

This tends to divide our total life into two departments. We come unconsciously to recognize two sets of actions. The first are performed with a feeling of satisfaction and a firm assurance that they are pleasing to God. These are the sacred acts and they are usually thought to be prayer, Bible reading, hymn singing, church attendance and such other acts as spring directly from faith. They may be known by the fact that they have no direct relation to this world, and would have no meaning whatever except as faith shows us another world, “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1).

Over against these sacred acts are the secular ones. They include all of the ordinary activities of life which we share with the children of Adam and Eve: eating, sleeping, working, looking after the needs of the body, and performing our dull and prosaic duties here on earth. These we often do reluctantly and with many

misgivings, often apologizing to God for what we consider a waste of time and strength. The upshot of this is that we are uneasy most of the time. We go about our common tasks with a feeling of deep frustration, telling ourselves pensively that there is a better day coming when we shall slough off this earthly shell and be bothered no more with the affairs of this world.

This is the old sacred-secular antithesis. Most Christians are caught in its trap. They cannot get a satisfactory adjustment between the claims of the two worlds. They try to walk the tightrope between two kingdoms and they find no peace in either. Their strength is reduced, their outlook confused, and their joy taken from them.

I believe this state of affairs to be wholly unnecessary. We have gotten ourselves on the horns of a dilemma, true enough, but the dilemma is not real. It is a creature of misunderstanding. The sacred-secular antithesis has no foundation in the New Testament. Without doubt a more perfect understanding of Christian truth will deliver us from it.

The Lord Jesus Christ himself is our perfect example, and he knew no divided life. In the presence of his Father, he lived on earth without strain from babyhood to his death on the cross. God accepted the offering of his total life, and made no distinction between act and act. "I always do those things that please Him" was his brief summary of his own life as it related to the Father (John 8:29). As he moved among people he was poised and restful. What pressure and suffering he endured grew out of his position as the world's sin-bearer; they were never the result of moral uncertainty or spiritual maladjustment.

Paul's exhortation to "do all to the glory of God" is more than pious idealism (1 Cor 10:31). It is an integral part of the sacred revelation and is to be accepted as the very word of truth. It opens before us the possibility of making every act of our lives contribute to the glory of God. Lest we should be too timid to include everything, Paul mentions specifically eating and drinking. This humble privilege we share with the beasts that perish. If these lowly animal acts can be so performed as to honor God, then it becomes difficult to conceive of one that cannot.

That monkish hatred of the body which figures so prominently in the works of certain early devotional writers is wholly without support in the word of God. Common modesty is found in the sacred Scriptures, it is true, but never prudery or a false sense of shame. The New Testament accepts as a matter of course that in his incarnation our Lord took upon him a real human body, and no effort is made to steer around the downright implications of such a fact. He lived in that body here among people and never once performed a non-sacred act. His presence in human flesh sweeps away forever the evil notion that there is about the human body something innately offensive to the Deity. God created our bodies, and we do not offend him by placing the responsibility where it belongs. He is not ashamed of the work of his own hands.

Perversion, misuse, and abuse of our human powers should give us cause enough to be ashamed. Bodily acts done in sin and contrary to nature can never honor God. Wherever the human will may introduce moral evil, we have no longer our innocent and harmless powers as God made them; we have instead an abused and twisted thing which can never bring glory to its Creator.

Let us, however, assume that perversion and abuse are not present. Let us think of Christian believers in whose lives the twin wonders of repentance and the new birth have been wrought. They are now living according to the will of God as they understand it from the written word. Of such people it may be said that every act of their lives is or can be as truly sacred as prayer or baptism or the Lord's Supper. To say this is not to bring all acts down to one dead level; it is rather to lift every act up into a living kingdom and turn the whole life into a sacrament.

If a sacrament is an external expression of an inward grace then we need not hesitate to accept the above thesis. By one act of consecration of our total selves to God we can make every subsequent act express that consecration. We need no more be ashamed of our body—the fleshly servant that carries us through life—than Jesus was of the humble beast upon which he rode into Jerusalem. “The Lord has need of it” may well apply to our mortal bodies (Luke 19:31). If Christ dwells in us, we may bear about the Lord of glory as the little beast did of old and give occasion to the multitudes to cry, “Hosanna in the highest!” (Matt 21:9).

That we see this truth is not enough. If we would escape from the toils of the sacred-secular dilemma the truth must “run in our blood” and condition the complexion of our thoughts. We must practice living to the glory of God, actually and determinedly. By meditation upon this truth, by talking it over with God often in our prayers, by recalling it to our minds frequently as we move about among people, a *sense* of its wondrous meaning will begin to take hold of us. The old painful duality will go down before a restful unity of life. The knowledge that we are all

God's, that he has received all and rejected nothing, will unify our inner lives and make everything sacred to us.

This is not quite all. Long-held habits do not die easily. It will take intelligent thought and a great deal of reverent prayer to escape completely from the sacred-secular psychology. For instance, it may be difficult for the average Christian to get hold of the idea that their daily labors can be performed as acts of worship acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. The old antithesis will crop up in the back of their head sometimes to disturb their peace of mind. Nor will that old serpent, the devil, take all this lying down. He will be there in the cab or at the desk or in the field to remind Christians that they are giving the better part of their day to the things of this world and allotting to their religious duties only a trifling portion of their time. And unless great care is taken this will create confusion and bring discouragement and heaviness of heart.

We can meet this successfully only by the exercise of an aggressive faith. We must offer all our acts to God and believe that He accepts them. Then hold firmly to that position and keep insisting that every act of every hour of the day and night be included in the transaction. Keep reminding God in our times of private prayer that we mean every act for his glory; then supplement those times by a thousand thought-prayers as we go about the job of living. Let us practice the fine art of making every work a priestly ministry. Let us believe that God is in all our simple deeds and learn to find him there.

*Let us practice the fine art of making
every work a priestly ministry.*

An accompanying error is the sacred-secular antithesis as applied to places. It is little short of astonishing that we can read the New Testament and still believe in the inherent sacredness of places as distinguished from other places. This error is so widespread that one feels all alone when trying to combat it. It has acted as a kind of dye to color the thinking of religious persons and has colored the eyes as well so that it is all but impossible to detect its fallacy. In the face of every New Testament teaching to the contrary it has been said and sung throughout the centuries and accepted as a part of the Christian message, which it most surely is not.

Here are the facts as I see them. For four hundred years Israel had dwelt in Egypt, surrounded by the crudest idolatry. By the hand of Moses, they were brought out at last and started toward the land of promise. The very idea of holiness had been lost to them. To correct this, God began at the bottom. He localized himself in the cloud and fire, and later, when the tabernacle had been built, he dwelt in fiery manifestation in the Holy of Holies. By innumerable distinctions God taught Israel the difference between holy and unholy. There were holy days, holy vessels, holy garments. There were washings, sacrifices, offerings of many kinds. By these means Israel learned that *God is holy*. It was this that he was teaching them. Not the holiness of things or places, but the holiness of Jehovah was the lesson they must learn.

Then came the great day when Christ appeared. Immediately he began to say, "You have heard that it was said to those of old . . . but *I say to you*" (Matt 5:27–28). The Old Testament schooling was over. When Christ died on the cross the veil of the temple was ripped open from top to

bottom. The Holy of Holies was opened to everyone who would enter in faith. Christ's words were remembered, "A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. . . . Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:21–24, NIV).

Shortly after, Paul took up the cry of liberty and declared all meats clean, every day holy, all places sacred and every act acceptable to God (Rom 14:5, 20). The sacredness of times and places, a half-light necessary to the education of the race, passed away before the full sun of spiritual worship.¹

In order that I may be understood and not be misunderstood, I would throw into relief the practical implications of the teaching for which I have been arguing, that is, the sacramental quality of everyday living. Over against its positive meanings I should like to point out a few things it does not mean.

It does not mean, for instance, that everything we do is of equal importance with everything else we do or may do. One act of a good person's life may differ widely from another in importance. Paul's sewing of tents was not equal to his writing of an Epistle to the Romans, but both were accepted of God and both were true acts of worship. Certainly, it is more important to lead a soul to Christ than to plant a garden, but the planting of the garden *can* be as holy an act as the winning of a soul.

1 Three paragraphs are removed here.

Again, it does not mean that every person is as useful as every other person. Gifts differ in the body of Christ. A Billy Bray² is not to be compared with a Luther* or a Wesley* for sheer usefulness to the church and to the world; but the service of the less-gifted brother is as pure as that of the more gifted, and God accepts both with equal pleasure.

Let everyone abide in the calling wherein they are called and their work will be as sacred as the work of the ministry.

Laypersons need never think of their humbler task as being inferior to that of their minister. Let everyone abide in the calling wherein they are called and their work will be as sacred as the work of the ministry. It is not what a person does that determines whether their work is sacred or secular, it is *why* they do it. The motive is everything. Let a person sanctify the Lord God in their heart and they can thereafter do no common act. All they do is good and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For such a person, living itself will be sacramental and the whole world a sanctuary. Their entire life will be a priestly ministration. As they perform their never so simple task, they will hear the voice of the seraphim saying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa 6:3).

Prayer

Lord, I want to trust you completely; I want to be altogether yours; I want to exalt you above all. I desire that I may feel no sense of possessing anything outside of you. I want

² Billy Bray (1794–1868) – Uneducated and unconventional, but also effective, English lay evangelist.

constantly to be aware of your overshadowing presence and to hear your speaking voice. I long to live in restful sincerity of heart. I want to live so fully in the Spirit that all my thought may be as sweet incense ascending to you and every act of my life may be an act of worship. Therefore, I pray in the words of your great servant of old, “I implore³ you so to purify the intention of my heart with the gift of your grace, that I may love you perfectly and praise you worthily.”⁴ And all this I confidently believe you will grant me through the merits of Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

3 Implore – Urge, earnestly request.

4 *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 100. A modified version of this prayer was later incorporated into the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.

Discussion Questions



Many in our society value strength and achievement and admire people who assert themselves powerfully. By contrast, the notion of meekness can seem weak and timid. How would you explain the biblical virtue of meekness to someone who assumes that it only makes people passive and ineffective?



What is the actual burden from which the cultivation of biblical meekness offers release and soul rest? What form does this burden sometimes take in your life? How is biblical meekness different from becoming irresponsible?



What is the best cure for those deep-seated feelings of shame that so often drive our need for achievement, for success, and for recognition, even in ministry?



Tozer mentions the familiar notion of a sacred-secular divide. He believes it is based upon a serious misunderstanding which, if left uncorrected, will artificially narrow the scope of our service to the Lord. What more mundane aspects of your life could you reframe as acts of sacred service?



Tozer speaks of “the sacramental quality of everyday living.” He means that even ordinary tasks can become holy (or sacred) when they are consciously and prayerfully undertaken as acts of loving service to God. What practical strategies might help us live our everyday lives with this attitude and orientation?

Afterword





THEOLOGY & ETHICS



Afterword

By this point you have probably read through *The Pursuit of God* in its entirety, and very possibly also considered some of the discussion questions posed in this edition. You are to be commended for the effort you have invested.

But now it is time to move on in your life. As you step away from Tozer's little book, what will you take from your investment in it?

It is worth pondering this question. Otherwise, the wisdom contained in this book may all too quickly fade from consciousness, and in a surprisingly brief amount of time become forgotten altogether. Its insights could all slide away like water off a duck.

The older saints well understood this risk. They countered it with a spiritual discipline they called recollection. It is the practice of reviewing in our minds what we have recently studied or experienced, and then inviting the

Holy Spirit to confirm to our hearts which specific insights should be permanently incorporated into who we are becoming. The takeaways from a little classic like this will not be the same for every reader. The Holy Spirit always takes into account our individuality, and the uniqueness of our current life situation, in shaping his personal communication to us.

While fully acknowledging this, let me conclude by inviting you to consider three overarching truths that come through loud and clear in *The Pursuit of God* and in the life of its author.

The first is that God can use people in very effective ways despite their lack of formal education or formal theological training. Such deficiencies are not insurmountable obstacles to usefulness for the Lord's humble servants who have been gifted with a lifelong passion to learn, who choose their mentors wisely, and who have an insatiable desire to know and love God with all of their hearts. God reached down and touched the heart of a teenager with limited education working in a rubber factory, and used him to influence the lives of thousands for good. God did it with Tozer, and he can do it again. Some might even argue that this is his signature way of building his church and advancing his kingdom.

The second is that Tozer's criticism of the conservative evangelical church back in the 1940s is, if anything, even more valid today than it was back then. He charged that in its worldly busyness, and its copycatting of the way the secular world does life, it had grown largely disconnected from the presence of God. The contemporary church scene is awash in spiritual zombies, and is dying from within.

Tozer offered hope then, and he still creates hope now: that if we are willing to seek God himself with our whole hearts, and esteem him more highly than anything else, and seek his will above all our personal ambitions, our souls will be revitalized and we will tap into the true wellspring of genuine spiritual life once again.

Third, and finally, Tozer reminds us that vibrant Christianity is about more than simply believing right doctrines and practicing right behaviors, important though both of these are. There must also be a relational dimension to the Christian life, an aspect of *real meeting* with the living God. Nothing less is sufficient to sustain a living faith over the long term, and nothing less will satisfy the longings of a spiritually exhausted world. Echoing the spiritual giant Augustine, and a great cloud of witnesses ever since, Tozer shares with us his own discovery of the exquisitely satisfying experience of beholding God's magnificent splendor and beauty in adoration and delight. In the end, we were meant to live our earthly lives with hearts fully satisfied by God alone. He alone will never disappoint.

Perhaps our most significant takeaway from *The Pursuit of God* will not be any one piece of information that Tozer has shared with us here. Perhaps, instead, it will be the "holy envy" he has stirred up within us as readers. If he has lighted a fire of desire in any of us for what he experienced of God, his mission will have been accomplished. May it be so.



THEOLOGY & ETHICS

Resources for Application





THEOLOGY & ETHICS

Soul Work and Soul Care: Contemplation and Spiritual Classics

By Isaiah A. Swain and Hank Voss

No one presumes to teach an art until he has first carefully studied it. Look how foolish it is for the inexperienced to assume pastoral authority, since the care of souls is the art of arts!

~ Gregory the Great, c. 590

Your leaders . . . keep watch over your souls and will give an account for their work.

~ Hebrews 13:17a

Each Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic has a “Soul Work and Soul Care” resource to illustrate how Christian leaders across cultures and generations have found a particular spiritual classic helpful in pastoral ministry. “Soul work” includes the *personal* work of watering, weeding, pruning, and fertilizing the garden of one’s own soul. In a similar way, “soul care” involves the *pastoral* work of nurturing growth in another’s friendship with God. When Jesus discusses soul work and soul care, he often uses metaphors from the medical and agricultural professions. Like a doctor for souls, or a farmer caring for an orchard of spiritual fruit trees, congregational leaders who hope to tend souls can learn much from the wisdom of those who have gone before us.

Two of Tozer's Tools: Contemplation and Spiritual Classics

As a sixteen-year-old, my (Hank's) mom gave me my first "theology" book, A. W. Tozer's *The Pursuit of God*. I remember being amazed at the depth of Tozer's passion for the presence of the Lord. It was different from what I had experienced elsewhere; thirty years later I find myself still hungry to know God in the way Tozer describes. Perhaps you have had a similar experience as you have read or reread this edition of *The Pursuit of God*?

How did Tozer's soul grow in its desire for God? Tozer emphasized that it is the desire itself that is the important thing. But how does one increase desire? Two practices modeled in Tozer's own life are especially worthy of imitation (Heb 13:7). The first is contemplative prayer and the second is a habit of regularly reading from spiritual classics.

Contemplation or Contemplative Prayer

Tozer's dedication to prayer is frequently noted by those who knew him. Imagine witnessing one of the scenes described below: finding Tozer praying in his church office or stumbling over him as the sun comes up along the beach of Lake Michigan.

Tozer spent incalculable hours in prayer. Most of his prolonged prayer time—with his Bible and hymnals as his only companions—took place in his church office on the back side of the second floor. He would carefully hang up his suit trousers and don his sweater and raggedy old "prayer pants" and sit for a while on his ancient office couch. After a time his spirit would drift into another realm. In time, he would abandon the couch, get on his knees, and

eventually lie facedown on the floor, singing praises to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. . . . And more than one of [his coworkers] mentioned that Tozer was weeping or moaning facedown in the old carpet.¹

One thinks of [Tozer's] practice of worshiping prostrate on the sandy south Chicago shoreline of Lake Michigan in the early dawn, even being kicked by a policeman who assumed he had lain there drunk all night.²

As you read these descriptions of Tozer putting on his “prayer pants” or facedown in worship at dawn and being mistaken for a drunk, what feelings arise in your heart? Do you desire to experience “the manifestation of the Presence” of God like Tozer did? Do you long to dwell deeper in God’s love?

The Pursuit of God offers resources to expand our vision and intention to know God the way that Tozer did. Contemplative prayer provides a *means* toward that expanded vision. There is much confusion about contemplative prayer today, and before discussing the “means” of Christian contemplation, a brief orientation may be helpful.

First, Christian contemplation always “begins with the word of Scripture, and whatever rung we are on, we are never beyond this hearing of the word.”³ Just as believers can never leave Jesus’s humanity behind in theological

1 Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 121–22.

2 Glen G. Scorgie, “A Distinctively Christian Contemplation: A Comparison with Other Religions,” in *Embracing Contemplation: Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice*, ed. John Coe and Kyle Strobil (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 273.

3 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 9.



reflection, so we can never leave Scripture behind when the Spirit leads us in contemplation.⁴ Those familiar with the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* will recognize “contemplation” as the fourth step of a prayerful and meditative engagement with Scripture. Christian contemplative prayer always remains rooted and grounded in biblical meditation.

Second, the concept of “contemplation” or “contemplative prayer” is used in many ways apart from this traditional Christian grounding. In a helpful essay contrasting Christian contemplation with versions found in Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and secularism, Glen Scorgie notes that “the phenomenon of contemplation can actually be subdivided into about twenty different types. These types are carefully distinguished according to the practices they advocate, the goals to which they aspire, and the experiences they evoke.”⁵ Those who practice it are wise to recognize that the contemplative prayer which strengthened Tozer’s soul is not the same kind found in many contemporary discussions of spirituality.⁶

Third, recognize that contemplative prayer is only one of the diverse ways Christians pray. Many Christians pray the Lord’s Prayer daily. Following Jesus’s example, we

4 See further examples of the importance of Scripture in contemplation in Kyle Strobel, “Contemplation by Son and Spirit: Reforming the Ascent of the Soul to God,” in *Embracing Contemplation: Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice*, ed. John Coe and Kyle Strobel (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 166–84.

5 Scorgie, “A Distinctively Christian Contemplation,” 265.

6 The volume on contemplation by Coe and Strobel has already been referenced several times. Evangelicals interested in learning more about the practice are encouraged to engage the essays found there. See John Coe and Kyle Strobel, eds., *Embracing Contemplation: Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).

pray the Psalms.⁷ We pray intercessory prayers, breath prayers, thanksgiving prayers, and many more. For most, contemplative prayer is not the first kind of prayer prayed when beginning to walk with Jesus. But as Jesus's followers continue on the journey to increasing Christlikeness, there will eventually be a turn to contemplation—after all, contemplation is a central activity in heaven!⁸

Why Contemplative Prayer?

Contemplative prayer is a church practice aimed at helping disciples of Jesus consciously commune with God and rest in his love. Since the presence of God brings fullness of joy (Pss 16:11; 21:6; John 15:11), disciples ought to set their highest desires on abiding continually in the conscious presence of God (Ps 27:4; Luke 10:41–42).

Philosopher J. P. Moreland identifies two purposes for contemplative prayer. First, it helps us “attach emotionally and intimately to our loving God—to love God with all our hearts, to seek God for his own sake, even if we do not experience something.”⁹ Second, contemplative prayer helps us “transform our character by learning to center and calm ourselves, to focus without distraction on a member of the Trinity or on God in general . . . to see our anxiety depart and be replaced by peace and joy.”¹⁰ Contemplative prayer involves “deep, fully focused openness to and

7 See Carmen Joy Imes, ed., *Praying the Psalms with Augustine and Friends*, Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics 1 (Upland, IN: Samuel Morris Publications, 2021).

8 For an overview of how this theme has looked across the last two thousand years, see Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

9 J. P. Moreland, *Finding Quiet: My Story of Overcoming Anxiety and the Practices that Brought Peace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 97.

10 Moreland, 97.

concentration on God” that has been shown to change neuropathways in our brains, rewiring our anxious hearts toward peace and joy.¹¹ In sum, contemplative prayer guides us into a deeper knowledge, experience, and understanding of the love of God.

Why is contemplative prayer especially needed by this generation? At least three reasons are evident: distraction, busyness, and an increasingly secular context. First, we live in an age of distraction. Money, sex, and power have always been challenging distractions to serious disciples. But the power of these distractions was exponentially increased in 2013 when a majority of North Americans became owners and operators of smartphones. What was true for North America in 2013 has become increasingly true for the entire world. Today, digital distractions abound unlike in any previous generation. A majority of the world’s population has access to encyclopedic knowledge, limitless entertainment, and sexual temptations (especially pornography) at a level never seen in earth’s history.

A second reason we need contemplation is because we live in an age of busyness. A friend of mine (Hank) often remarks, “BUSY means Being Under Satan’s Yoke!” Pastor Robert Sarah understands this truth with special clarity. He grew up in Africa under a dictatorship and has described life in the West as life in a dictatorship—a dictatorship of noise.

Our world no longer hears God because it is constantly speaking, at a devastating speed and volume, in order to say nothing. Modern civilization does not know how to be quiet. It holds forth in an unending monologue. . . .

11 Moreland, 97.

Thus there is a dictatorship of speech, a dictatorship of verbal emphasis.¹²

The busyness of our lives and the constant noise that comes with this busyness leaves us too busy to pursue God.

A third reason we need contemplation is that Christians in the West increasingly live in a “secular age.” Recently, New Testament scholar Dan Darko joined the teaching faculty at Taylor University where I (Hank) work. Darko was born and began his ministry in Ghana, was later educated in Europe, and has taught in North America for some two decades. Darko repeatedly points out that many Christians in Europe and North America have their imaginations limited by the European Enlightenment. We tend to assume as “primitive” the idea that Paul’s description of evil spiritual forces in Ephesians carries ontological weight (6:10–20).¹³ Darko’s concerns about citizens of Western society tending to be less aware of spiritual realities fits a larger narrative that scholars like Charles Taylor have told elsewhere.¹⁴ In short, citizens of Western countries like the United States tend to assume that only objects that can be measured scientifically are worthy of study and attention.

Digital distractions, busyness, and a secular approach to life will continue as significant challenges to the practice

12 Robert Sarah, *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2017), 56.

13 Daniel K. Darko, *Against Principalities and Powers: Spiritual Beings in Relation to Communal Identity and the Moral Discourse of Ephesians* (Carlisle: HippoBooks, 2020), 1–17.

14 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007); James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

of contemplative prayer. For those determined to engage in it despite these challenges, the following four steps provide a way to begin. They are adapted from a model proposed by J. P. Moreland. Moreland practices contemplative prayer for an hour each morning and evening. Like Tozer, his life has been transformed by it. This simple model can be summarized as stop, settle, speak, surrender. It is a resource to experiment with as you begin your own practice of contemplative prayer.

Practicing Contemplative Prayer

Step 1: Stop. Find a still, safe spot (Ps 46:10). Often our minds and hearts are going so fast we feel like we cannot stop. When we do stop, we can recognize that we are the ones being sought—God is the seeker, and we respond (John 15:16).

Choose a place where you can form a habit of contemplative prayer. It should be still, safe, and the same to minimize distractions and help you engage with God's presence. Set a timer so that you do not have to worry about time. Start with ten or fifteen minutes, adding time as you desire. In silence, focus your attention on God. Recall his gifts with gratitude. Should distracting thoughts arise, write them down to return to later and refocus. Tozer advises, "It is best that we get alone, preferably with our Bible outspread before us. Then if we will we may draw near to God and begin to hear him speak to us in our hearts."¹⁵

¹⁵ Page 92. On hearing from God, Tozer also said, "The voice of God is a friendly voice. No one need fear to listen to it unless he has already made up his mind to resist it" [page 91]. For more on hearing God's voice, see Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012).

Step 2: Settle. Check your brain, chest, stomach, jaw, and any other places your body manifests stress. Speak scriptural truth to these specific places in your body. Allow core Scriptures to form your core self and transform you into greater conformity to Christ (Ps 131:2). Like Tozer, shift “interest from the seen to the unseen.”¹⁶

One tool to help identify what is going on inside of us is a “body scan.” A body scan is when we consciously think about each part of our body and what we are experiencing in it. The psalmists were experts at body scans. Another tool is RULER, developed by Marc Brackett.¹⁷ RULER stands for Recognize, Understand, Label, Express, and Regulate. Naming our emotions using the first three steps of RULER can be especially helpful in settling our bodies.

Once aware of what is taking place in our bodies, we are ready to invite Jesus to speak his peace to those parts of our bodies where stress or negative emotions are present (Matt 11:28–30; John 14:27). Imagine Jesus laying his hands on your head, on your chest, or wherever you feel worried or stuck. Imagine Jesus speaking the word, “Peace,” to that place. Pause and be still (Ps 46:10).

Step 3: Speak. Tell God your needs (Phil 4:6–7). Do not try listing all your problems, but express just a few main worries. Release your needs to God, who provides for all our needs (Matt 6:25–34). Give your stressors, needs, and worries over to God because he cares for you (1 Pet 5:7).

¹⁶ Page 69.

¹⁷ Marc Brackett, *Permission to Feel: The Power of Emotional Intelligence to Achieve Well-Being and Success* (New York: Celadon, 2020).

Step 4: Surrender. Now that you have given your needs over to God, give yourself over to him (Ps 27:4). Abide in God's love (John 15:9). Moreland says,

It is time to open my heart to God and love him from my heart, to seek to connect with him, and to put myself in a place of waiting and anticipation for the Lord to make himself real to me or speak to me if he chooses. . . . As I wait, I seek to maintain my gaze on God, being aware that he maintains his gaze on me, whether or not I experience it.¹⁸

Those who choose to engage in contemplative prayer like Tozer “want to taste, to touch with their hearts, to see with their inner eyes the wonder that is God.”¹⁹ But do not be discouraged if you do not “feel” anything. Remember,

The Presence and the manifestation of the Presence are not the same. There can be the one without the other. God is here when we are wholly unaware of it. He is *manifest* only when and as we are aware of his presence. On our part there must be surrender to the Spirit of God, for his work it is to show us the Father and the Son. If we cooperate with him in loving obedience, God will manifest himself to us, and that manifestation will be the difference between a nominal Christian life and a life radiant with the light of his face.²⁰

Dallas Willard would begin each morning with contemplative prayer rooted in the Lord's Prayer and Psalm 23. The four steps described above can be explored well by

¹⁸ Moreland, *Finding Quiet*, 100.

¹⁹ Page 25

²⁰ Page 74.

spending time slowly and meditatively engaging with God following the guidance of these two prayer passages.

Additional Resources

Foster, Richard J. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. New York: HarperOne, 1992.

Howard, Evan B. *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008. See especially pages 310, 315–16, and 324–25.

Strobel, Kyle, and John Coe. *Where Prayer Becomes Real: How Honesty with God Transforms Your Soul*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021.

———, eds. *Embracing Contemplation: Reclaiming a Christian Spiritual Practice*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Prayer*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986.

Willard, Dallas. *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*. 4th ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012.

Reading Spiritual Classics

A. W. Tozer grew up poor, without the opportunity to complete high school. While working in a tire factory, he heard the good news about Jesus, repented, and believed. At nineteen, he began to preach, becoming one of the most influential pastors in his generation. His books *The Pursuit of God* and *The Knowledge of the Holy* have helped millions know and love the Triune God revealed in Scripture. When asked how he learned to read Scripture with such clarity

and theological depth, Tozer would point to his “friends” and “teachers”—a list of some thirty-five Christian spiritual classics he read and reread throughout his life. Tozer’s “teachers” served as mentors to whom he apprenticed himself throughout his long and fruitful ministry.

Tozer was deeply committed to Christian spiritual classics. In an unpublished letter to William Peterson dated December 14, 1959, Tozer agreed to “list a few classics that every educated Christian should read.” These thirty-five Christian spiritual classics are listed below. In addition to these, Tozer noted in his *Alliance Weekly* editorial for March 21, 1956, that a number of mystical classics had been republished recently, in which he mentioned William Law and Jacob Boehme among the great names. In his book *The Divine Conquest*, Tozer lists the writers who were most helpful for him. The five spiritual writers on both lists are marked with an asterisk below.

Tozer’s Thirty-Five “Teachers”

1. *Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*, Jan van Ruysbroeck
2. *Amendment of Life*, Richard Rolle
3. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, John of the Cross
4. *The Ascent of Mount Zion*, Berdardeno de Laredo
5. *Centuries of Meditations*, Thomas Traherne
6. *Christian Perfection*, François Fénelon*
7. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Anonymous
8. *Confessions*, Augustine of Hippo

9. *Dark Night of the Soul*, John of the Cross
10. *The Goad of Love*, Walter Hilton
11. *A Guide to True Peace*, François Fénelon, Madam Jeanne Guyon, Miguel de Molinos
12. *Hymns*, Gerhard Tersteegen
13. *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis
14. *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Francis de Sales
15. *Letters of Direction*, Henri de Tourville
16. *A Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, Henry Suso
17. *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius of Alexandria
18. *On the Love of God*, Bernard of Clairvaux
19. *Poems*, Frederick Faber*
20. *Poems*, Isaac Watts
21. *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Brother Lawrence*
22. *Private Devotions*, Lancelot Andrewes
23. *Proslogium*, Anselm of Canterbury
24. *The Quiet Way*, Gerhard Tersteegen
25. *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian of Norwich
26. *The Scale of Perfection*, Walter Hilton
27. *Sermons*, John Tauler
28. *Song of Songs*, Bernard of Clairvaux

29. *The Spiritual Combat*, Lorenzo Scupoli
30. *The Spiritual Guide*, Miguel de Molinos
31. *Talks of Instruction*, Meister Eckhart*
32. *A Testament of Devotion*, Thomas Kelly
33. *Theologia Germanica*, Anonymous
34. *The Vision of God*, Nicholas of Cusa*
35. *The Way of Christ*, Jacob Boehme

What is a Christian Spiritual Classic?

In the same letter in which he provides his list of thirty-five recommended spiritual classics, Tozer also suggests a criterium for defining a *Christian spiritual classic*: “It takes more than fifty years to prove a book.” Sacred Roots has adopted Tozer’s rule that a text must be tested by multiple generations of readers for at least fifty years before it is considered a “spiritual classic.” In addition to being at least fifty years old, a Christian spiritual classic is *a non-canonical text attested to across centuries and cultures as helpful for soul work and soul care.*

A spiritual classic is *non-canonical*; it is not Christian Scripture—not one of the books of the Old or New Testaments. Spiritual classics come in different genres, including books, letters, journals, autobiographies, and more. A text is *attested to across centuries* if it has continued to endure the test of time. Like Tozer, Sacred Roots considers a book qualified for consideration as a spiritual classic after fifty years. Being *attested to across . . . cultures* means the spiritual classic has a wide geographical reach, not only being helpful for a specific culture but

being widely read and utilized across cultural lines. They have often been translated into many languages and gone through multiple editions. Finally, Christian spiritual classics are *helpful for soul work and soul care* as they aid the personal work of watering, weeding, pruning, and fertilizing the garden of one's own soul and the pastoral work of nurturing growth in another's friendship with God.

Spiritual Classics and Soul Work

Spiritual classics give us a wider and deeper vision of the Christian life. Tozer urges us to “come near to the holy men and women of the past” so that we may “feel the heat of their desire after God.”²¹ They call out, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). From them we learn how to increase faithfulness and fruitfulness in our own context. We notice new ways of loving God and loving neighbors. Hidden sins are brought to light as the spiritual classic helps us identify and name things within us previously unacknowledged.

Spiritual classics help us read Scripture with greater clarity. Tozer suggests “we could gain much from a little acquaintance with men and women of [Nicholas of Cusa’s] spiritual flavor and the school of Christian thought which they represent.”²² The newest school of thought is not automatically the best one. This kind of thinking is, as C. S. Lewis puts it, chronologically snobbish. We too frequently place our (post)modern assumptions and ideas on a high pedestal at the expense of all other opinions and perceptions from across church history. This results in a reading of Scripture that is disjointed from the past two

²¹ Page 23.

²² Page 104.

thousand years of God's activity in the world and ignores the voices of the majority of Christians.

Through Christian spiritual classics, we can give Nicholas of Cusa, Benedict of Nursia, or Athanasius of Alexandria a seat at the theological table. We can compare and contrast our observations of Scripture with John Woolman, Phoebe Palmer, or Howard Thurman. When we have a question, we can "discuss" it with John Calvin or "ask" Thomas Aquinas's opinion. Their collective years of prayer, study, and discernment are available to us in spiritual classics and help us better interpret Scripture.

Like Scripture, spiritual classics should be read slowly and devotionally. Just as the psalmist advises us to meditate on God's law (Ps 1:2), so we should meditate on, mull over, and carefully read spiritual classics. Devotionally reading spiritual classics can be viewed as an opportunity for spiritual apprenticeship. When we begin regarding spiritual classics as opportunities for mentorship rather than simply analytic study, they can begin speaking to our hearts in addition to our minds.

Spiritual classics should be read both critically and charitably. Everything read in a spiritual classic must ultimately be tested by the words of Scripture. When we do find a problem with a spiritual classic, we do not need to reject the whole classic. Rather, reading a spiritual classic is like eating ribs: eat the meat, but leave the bones (1 Thess 5:19–21). We thankfully take in the spiritual nutrients without choking on the bones of unbiblical teaching. The key to discerning the difference is a growing knowledge of Scripture and personal conformity to the character of Christ.

Finally, reading spiritual classics is similar to choosing friends. While Christians are commanded to love all people, we all have specific people whom we consider friends.²³ Friendships may be formed around similar interests, similar life experiences, or simply “clicking” with another person. Human finitude means we cannot be friends with everyone. Similarly, we will find ourselves connecting more with some authors or classics and less with others. We will “click” with some on a deeper level than others. This is normal, and when we find spiritual classics that edify us, we should spend extra time with them. Just as friendships are deepened when we invest intentional time in them, so our devotional life will be deepened by spending extended time with our favorite spiritual classics.

Spiritual Classics and Soul Care

I (Isaiah) am a relatively capable do-it-yourselfer who likes to complete my own home improvement projects. Sometimes, the project required is above my level of experience—like when my foot fell through our ceiling and made a hole above our furnace. To fix the ceiling, we needed to disassemble the furnace. I was uncomfortable doing that job on my own, so one of our friends with repair experience helped me and taught me how to fix the ceiling.

Spiritual classics work the same way. When a brother or sister comes to us with a need for soul care, we may need expert assistance. We can point them to a “soul improvement expert” like John Owen or Julian of

23 For a discussion of Christian friendship, see Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship: Learning to Be Friends with God and One Another*, ed. Hank Voss, Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics 3 (Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2022).

Norwich. Spiritual classics are tools in our toolbox that we lend to those needing a spiritual repair.

We might also think about spiritual classics as a pharmacy for soul care. As we become familiar with spiritual classics, we notice which ones are antidotes for specific “soul sicknesses.” For example, James Houston recognizes Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations of Divine Love* as an effective “soul medicine” for victims of sexual abuse.²⁴ Additionally, C. S. Lewis was well known for recommending specific spiritual classics to individuals who wrote him with questions about Christian theology and spirituality.²⁵ “Prescribing” spiritual classics to others can be a useful way to encourage their spiritual formation, but it requires an adequate knowledge of both the person and the spiritual classic. Thus, a discipline of reading spiritual classics can perform a double duty of aiding personal soul work and informing our ministry of soul care.

Where Do I Find Spiritual Classics?

Eugene Peterson tells the story of a man addicted to drugs for some twenty years. One day he met several former drug dealers who were now following Jesus. The man gave his life to Christ but had a significant problem. He had experienced many terrible things from Christians and did not trust them. He went to a used bookstore and asked, “Do you have any books by dead Christians? I don’t trust living ones.” He left with a book by A. W. Tozer, and read nothing but Tozer for a year. After this experience, he was

24 James Houston, interview by Hank Voss, July 30, 2019, Vancouver, BC.

25 Walter Hooper, ed., *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume II: Books, Broadcasts, and the War, 1931–1949*, vol. 2, 3 vols. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 528–29, 775, 915, 993–94.

able to slowly learn to trust living Christians and became an active member in his church.²⁶

Visiting used bookstores is one way to find spiritual classics. This was Tozer's preferred method. But there is also much wisdom in starting with spiritual classics recommended by others. One can ask friends about their favorite classics and read and discuss those. Two other helpful places to begin are anthologies and collections.

Anthologies are short readings from a collection of spiritual classics. These give you a taste of what they are like. Two excellent ones to begin with are *Devotional Classics* and *Spiritual Classics*, both edited by Richard Foster. Broader and more comprehensive are the anthologies by John Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, and Bernard McGinn, *The Essentials of Christian Mysticism*.

Collections, or series, of spiritual classics are books that have been selected by a group of editors who want to recommend a particular set of spiritual classics. Classics of Western Spirituality is a well-known series published by a Roman Catholic publishing house. Popular Patristics is a helpful series for reading spiritual classics especially important to Orthodox Christians. The Puritan Paperbacks series is a helpful place to begin exploring Puritan spiritual classics.

This book is part of the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics, a series especially aimed at providing recommendations for global Christians interested in reading spiritual classics from an evangelical perspective (evangelical

26 Eugene H. Peterson, *Take and Read: Spiritual Reading: An Annotated List* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), xi–xii.

as defined by the Lausanne Movement).²⁷ More than fourteen hundred spiritual classics were reviewed from some fifty collections and anthologies in preparation for this series. The sixteen spiritual classics selected in conversation with over one hundred evangelical theological educators and practitioners are especially aimed at helping Christian leaders with soul work and soul care. A list of the sixteen spiritual classics in this series can be found at the end of the book. More resources for the study of Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics can be found at www.sacredrootsministry.org.

We pray your exploration of contemplative prayer and reading of spiritual classics will be fruitful, leading to greater faithfulness and flourishing in your walk with God and neighbors. Remember to start small and build slowly. With contemplative prayer, begin with five or ten minutes a day. With the spiritual classics, begin to build up your own group of “teachers”: spiritual classics that have been especially helpful to you in increasing your love and passion for the Lord. Read and reread your favorites and slowly add to them over time. It is far better to have one or two that have truly helped you than a list of twenty-five that have failed to impact your love for God. May the Holy Spirit guide and bless you as you pursue the love of Christ and the joy of the Father in the practice of contemplative prayer and the reading of spiritual classics.

Additional Resources

Bockmuehl, Klaus. *A Religion of Books: God's Tools in the History of Salvation*. Special ed. Moscow, ID: Community Christian Ministries, 2020.

27 For more information, visit lausanne.org.

Foster, Richard J., and Emilie Griffin, eds. *Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2007.

Foster, Richard J., and James Bryan Smith, eds. *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups*. Rev. ed. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2005.

Goggin, Jamin, and Kyle Strobel, eds. *Reading the Christian Spiritual Classics: A Guide for Evangelicals*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013. Carefully study the first three chapters.

Howard, Evan B. *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008. See especially pages 17, 55–60, and 271–72.

McGinn, Bernard, ed. *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*. 2nd ed. Modern Library Classics. New York: Modern Library, 2006.

Tyson, John R., ed. *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Continuing the Conversation

By Glen G. Scorgie

The Pursuit of God is a gateway into the larger spiritual vision and experience of A. W. Tozer.

The person and works of A. W. Tozer are certainly worthy of further, detailed study. A number of biographies of Tozer illuminate his life and character, and among these two stand out as especially useful. The first of these is

David J. Fant, Jr. *A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth Century Prophet*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1964.

It was published the year following Tozer's death, and is the closest thing we have to an official biography. The second is much more recent:

Lyle Dorsett. *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer*. Chicago: Moody, 2008.

On the basis of fresh research, this second biography adds valuable insights into Tozer's life and work.

As we have already noted, *The Pursuit of God* is the most famous of A. W. Tozer's writings. However, Tozer wrote other edifying works that also warrant careful, meditative reading. Among these is

A. W. Tozer. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.

The Knowledge of the Holy is a reverent reflection on various attributes of God revealed in Scripture. *The Pursuit of God* was designed to inspire Christians to pursue God more

passionately; *The Knowledge of the Holy* creates a profile of God in God's magnificent splendor, thereby drawing the seeker with even more intensified magnetic force toward the one who alone can provide soul satisfaction for humanity.

Tozer also wrote

A. W. Tozer. *The Divine Conquest*. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1950.

The Divine Conquest is a natural companion to the aforementioned two books. Its title signifies Tozer's conviction that in order to experience the indwelling presence of God in its fullness, a person must first fully surrender their own aims and ambitions. The triumph of God in the interior life of a believer opens up new vistas of spiritual possibilities.

We have pointed out that Tozer's spiritual journey was along a pathway forged by the classic Christian mystics. It is a pathway that prioritizes the goal of relational communion with God, and celebrates the possibility of direct experiential encounter with the presence of the living God. Toward the end of his life, Tozer compiled a collection of poetry by some of the Christian mystics through the centuries that had inspired and shaped him personally:

A. W. Tozer. *The Christian Book of Mystical Verse*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1963.

The Christian Book of Mystical Verse is a feast of such poetic reflections. It reveals not only the breadth of Tozer's own reading, but also the Christ-centered and biblically faithful character of his mysticism, and the joyous rapture that he

and his mystical mentors experienced in their communion with God.

Tozer wrote other things as well. Early on, he produced slim biographies of denominational founder A. B. Simpson and missionary pioneer Robert Jaffray before deciding that he was not called to be a biographer.

A. W. Tozer. *Wingspread: Albert B. Simpson, A Study in Spiritual Altitude*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1943.

A. W. Tozer. *Let My People Go!: The Life of Robert A. Jaffray*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1950.

Yet, the qualities he celebrated in the lives of these two Christian leaders tell us something about what was important to Tozer himself.

Most of Tozer's writing consisted of brief, pungent editorials for the *Alliance Witness*, the magazine of his church denomination. During his lifetime, Tozer had three volumes of these reprinted:

A. W. Tozer. *The Root of the Righteous*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1955.

A. W. Tozer. *Born after Midnight*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1959.

A. W. Tozer. *Of God and Men*. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1960.

This repackaging practice has been continued after Tozer's death by a number of compilers, and extended to many of his sermons. Almost all of the many titles that circulate today

as works of Tozer are of this variety. Their contents, while interesting, tend not to be organized around clear themes.

A large number of Tozer's sermons were recorded, and are now available in audio form online free of charge. It is a remarkable experience to be able to listen to Tozer's live sermon delivery so many years after his death. These may be found at <http://sermonindex.net/modules/mydownloads/viewcat.php?cid=6>.

Tozer repeatedly offered lists of Christian mystical writings and writers that he had found personally helpful. His favorite mystics included Nicholas of Cusa, François Fénelon, and Gerhard Tersteegen.¹ Many of their classic writings are readily available today in highly readable translations, most notably in the Classics of Western Spirituality series. But if there is one classic that embodies the very best of evangelical Protestant mysticism, and the themes that were most dear to Tozer, it is almost certainly *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (London, 1677), written by a youthful Scottish Puritan by the name of Henry Scougal. His little book later shaped the spiritual lives of a number of prominent evangelical leaders of the eighteenth-century Great Awakening. The evangelist George Whitefield, for example, claimed that it had introduced him to what true religion was all about. It seems more than coincidence, then, that Tozer would write in *The Pursuit of God* that the exaltation of God over self "is central in the life of God in the soul." This phrasing suggests that Tozer was likely aware of, and appreciated, this little classic of evangelical Protestant mysticism.²

1 Tozer, *The Divine Conquest*, 13.

2 Admittedly, it is curious that this particular book's title is not to be found in any of Tozer's lists of recommended resources.

Tozer would have been the first to acknowledge that *The Pursuit of God* was never intended to be the last word in Christian spirituality. Rather, he saw himself more like the figure Christian in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, pointing others in the right direction, and getting them started on the way. *The Pursuit of God* was envisioned as an invitation, a beginning, designed to encourage those with a thirst for God to move ahead. Tozer's intent was that such seekers would, like himself, tap into the much larger reservoirs of spiritual wisdom and guidance that are such a valued part of the inheritance of the saints.

Glossary

Antithesis – Complete opposite.

Brainerd, David (1718–1747) – Colonial Puritan missionary to the native peoples of America.

Bray, Billy (1794–1868) – Uneducated and unconventional, but also effective, English lay evangelist.

Clamorous – Noisy.

Cosmogony – Theory of the origins of the universe.

Crucible – Metaphorically, a place or situation of trial with lasting consequences.

Deicides – God-killers.

Divine Immanence – The doctrine that God is here, everywhere present and near.

Dread – In this instance, evoking deep reverence.

Exhibitionism – Showing off.

Faber, Frederick (1814–1863) – English poet and hymnwriter.

Figure – A figure of speech; speaking in metaphorical terms.

Finney, Charles (1792–1875) – Influential American evangelist.

Fork – A tuning fork, used as a reliable standard for sound.

Fox, George (1624–1691) – An Englishman who, despite limited formal education, became the principal founder and organizer of the Quakers, a renewal movement within Protestantism that emphasized the contemplative and experiential dimensions of life with God.

Fundamentalists – Very conservative Protestants.

Godhead – The Trinity in unity.

Goods – His gifts, benefits, and blessings.

Gossamer – Thin, delicate, sheer.

Holmes, W. G. – Anglican clergyman, missionary and theologian.

Hügel, Friedrich von (1852–1925) – Son of an Austrian diplomat and lifelong resident of Great Britain, Baron von Hügel was a widely-read, and occasionally controversial, guide for many on Christian mystical experience.

Immediacy – Direct encounter.

Implore – Urge, earnestly request.

Infallible – Unable to fail.

Jehovah – A traditional English equivalent to Yahweh, the revealed name for God in the Old Testament.

Judicial Possessions – Legal standing.

Lao Tzu – Founder of the Asian religion now known as Daoism or Taoism, born in the sixth century BC.

Laver – Basin for water.

Learn by rote – Memorize by repetition.

M'Cheyne, Robert Murray (1813–1843) – Very youthful, ardent, and devout Scottish Presbyterian minister in Dundee, known best through Andrew Bonar's spiritual classic *The Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (1844).

Mercy Seat – The name of the lid of the Ark of the Covenant.

Michelangelo (1475–1564) – A great Renaissance sculptor.

Milton, John (1608–1674) – The great English Puritan poet whose epic poems *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671) were thoroughly baptized in biblical imagery and themes.

Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) – A favorite of Tozer's who was a wide-ranging medieval scholar, a busy church statesman, and above all an eloquent mystic whose heart was captured by his vision of God in Christ.

Overtures – Invitations.

Pantheism – The notion that everything is God.

Patriarch – Male authority or prominent father figure.

Prevenient Grace – A Christian doctrine which has been especially popularized in the past three centuries by John Wesley and his followers.

Quatrain – Poetic form with four lines.

Quietism – A stream of Christian spirituality which emphasizes being still, passive, and quiet before God in order to allow God to take the lead and direct every aspect of one's life.

Raja – Royal title similar to “king” or “prince” used in South and Southeast Asia.

Ravishing – Ecstatic, overwhelming.

Reckon – To count on.

Renunciation – The act of decisively relinquishing or giving away.

Rutherford, Samuel (1600–1661) – A Scottish Puritan.

Sentient – Sensing, feeling.

Servile – Groveling.

Showbread – Freshly baked sacred bread.

Spinoza, Benedict de (1632–1677) – Highly rationalistic European philosopher who elaborated on such purely intellectual knowledge of God in chapter five of his *Ethics* (1677).

Striving – Effort, endeavor.

Summum bonum – Latin phrase meaning “supreme good.”

Tempers – Temperaments or dispositions.

Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471) – Author of the medieval spiritual classic *The Imitation of Christ*.

Ubiquity – The state of being everywhere present.

Usurpers – Those intent on unseating rightful authorities and taking over for themselves.

The Westminster Confession (1647) – The main articulation of Calvinistic Presbyterian faith. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* was developed to instruct children in the tenets of this faith tradition.

Wire Grass – Dried-up stubble.

Map of Important Places



A Letter to God's Friends and Fellow Warriors On Why We Read the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics Together

Dear Friends and Fellow Warriors,

Greetings in the strong name of Jesus! What a joy to know that Jesus calls us “Friend” (John 15). What an honor to stand with sisters and brothers from every century and culture to shout, “Worthy is the Lamb!” What a privilege to serve in the Lamb’s army, not fighting flesh and blood, but God’s *internal* (the flesh), *external* (the world) and *infernal* (the devil) enemies. In light of this cosmic struggle, we put on a wartime (not peacetime) mindset as we follow Jesus. Moses stated that God is present and at work in every generation (Ps 90:1), and the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are for those who desire to be used within their sphere of influence like David was used by God in his generation (Ps 57:2; Acts 13:36).

Our Context: A Battle with God’s Internal, External, and Infernal Enemies

Scripture teaches our daily need to choose a missional mindset (Matt 6:10). God’s kingdom never advances in neutral territory. Every inch in creation, including each inch of our soul, is a contested battlefield. God’s enemies are threefold. First, there is an *internal* enemy hiding within the heart of each redeemed child of God. God loves us, even though we often battle a “Judas-heart”— a tendency to betray our Lord (John 12:6). Scripture names this brokenness the “flesh,” the old “man” or the “sin nature”

(Rom 8; Gal 5–6). We work to kill (“mortify”) this sin lest it succeed in killing us (Rom 6:13).

Second, as followers of Jesus, we battle all *external* enemies opposing the Lamb’s kingdom. Sickened by sin, polluted by greed, corrupted by self-centeredness, idolatry and oppression; our world is not the way it is supposed to be. What God created good has been twisted and now often grieves the Holy Spirit. We choose to stand with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in refusing to bow to the principalities and powers of the age (Dan 3), or to accept the besetting sins of our ethnicities, nations and generations. Scripture and our sacred roots shine painful yet purifying light on our blind spots.

Finally, we are not ignorant of the devil’s schemes. We may not know if a demon’s name is “Screwtape” or “Legion,” but we do know that an *infernal* enemy opposes God’s kingdom *shalom*. He is the devil, Satan, the father of lies, the Accuser, and one day soon he and his demons will be completely crushed. In this time between the times, the Lamb’s followers resist and renounce the devil and all his ways with the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

Our Mission: To Be Faithful Stewards and Wise Servants in Our Generation

Scripture contains a number of “history” psalms (Pss 78, 105, 106, 136; Neh 9:6–38; cf. Heb 11). These songs challenge us to reflect on women and men who chose to serve God in their generation—Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Phinehas, Rahab, David, Esther and many others. History psalms also warn of those who ignored or refused to participate in God’s work (Pharaoh, Dathan, Abiram, Og).

Leaders like Rahab the prostitute (Matt 1:5; Heb 11:35; James 2:25) and King David were far from perfect (Ps 51). Yet Scripture declares that leaders like David “served the purposes of God in his own generation” (Acts 13:36).

Do you want God to use you in your generation? Are you willing to be a David or an Esther today? God is already at work in our communities, schools and workplaces. Sometimes the neighborhoods with the greatest challenges (those with giants like “Goliath” and armies of Philistine enemies) are the very places God finds servants and stewards he can use (1 Sam 17; 1 Cor 4:1).



Like King David, Prince Kaboo of the Kru people in Liberia chose to participate in God’s work in his generation. As a child, Prince Kaboo (1873–1893) was taken hostage by a rival tribe and was about to be executed when he experienced a supernatural deliverance. After weeks of traveling through the jungle, Kaboo arrived at a mission station near Monrovia,

Liberia’s capital. There, as a fourteen-year-old teenager, he wholeheartedly gave his life to Jesus Christ.

Prince Kaboo took on the name Samuel Kaboo Morris at his baptism, and he spent the next four years working and studying Scripture—especially Jesus’s teaching about the Holy Spirit as recorded by his friend John (John 14–17). Kaboo was fascinated with the Holy Spirit, for

he had personally experienced the Holy Spirit's powerful deliverance. Eventually, the missionaries told Kaboo they had taught him all they knew and that if he wanted to learn more about the Holy Spirit, he would need to travel to the United States. Kaboo felt the need for more training about the Holy Spirit before being ready to return to the Kru as an evangelist. With no shoes or money, Kaboo walked to Monrovia's harbor to find passage to New York—trusting his Father in heaven to provide.

Kaboo's story is powerful. The ship that transported Kaboo experienced revival with the captain and many crew coming to Christ. Within a few hours of arriving in New York, Kaboo led seventeen men to Christ at an inner-city rescue mission. On his third day in the United States, the eighteen-year-old evangelist preached at a Sunday school meeting and revival broke out with a new missionary society organized that very day. God provided money for Kaboo's college tuition, housing, books and necessities. By the end of his first week in America, Kaboo had arrived in Fort Wayne, Indiana, to begin studying at Taylor University—an evangelical college committed to raising up workers for the harvest fields who walk in the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt 9:38; Acts 1:8).

Prince Kaboo's arrival at Taylor University transformed not only Taylor University's campus, but also the whole city of Fort Wayne. On his first Sunday in town, Kaboo walked to the front of the church and asked for permission to pray. As he prayed, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit descended on the congregation in a way none had ever experienced before. The pastor reported, "What I said and what Sammy said I do not remember, but I know my soul

was on fire as never before. . . . No such visitation of the Holy Spirit had ever been witnessed” by our congregation.¹



Two years later, on May 12, 1893, at the age of twenty, Prince Samuel Kaboo Morris died from an illness contracted after traveling through a snowstorm to preach. Since his death, Kaboo’s story has influenced thousands of students at Taylor University and elsewhere to participate with the Holy Spirit in mission and seek the Spirit’s power in witness. John Wengatz was a student at Taylor in 1906, the year he first read Kaboo’s story. Some fifty years later, after a lifetime invested as a missionary in Africa, Wengatz remarked “my tears never cease to flow as I read that unrepeatable story.”² Although Kaboo died at twenty, he was used mightily by God in his generation. Will those who tell the story of your life say the same?

Our Vision: Toward Ten Thousand “Tozers”

If you are pursuing God with the same passion and hunger displayed by Samuel Kaboo Morris, than you will be glad to meet A. W. Tozer (1897–1963). Tozer grew up poor without the opportunity to complete high school. While working in a tire factory he heard the good news about Jesus, repented and believed. At nineteen, he began to preach, becoming one of the most influential pastors in his generation. His books *The Pursuit of God* and *The*

1 Lindley Baldwin, *Samuel Morris: The African Boy God Sent to Prepare an American University for Its Mission to the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1987), 59.

2 John Wengatz, *Sammy Morris: Spirit-Filled Life* (Upland, IN: Taylor University Press, 1954), Preface.

Knowledge of the Holy have helped millions know and love the Triune God revealed in Scripture. When asked how he learned to read Scripture with such clarity and theological depth, Pastor Tozer would often point to his “friends” and “teachers.” These teachers were a list of some thirty-five Christian spiritual classics that he read and reread throughout his life. Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics (SRSC) are for those with a hunger for the Holy Spirit like Prince Kaboo and a desire to be used like Pastor Tozer.

Sacred Roots envisions ten thousand Christian leaders, serving in challenging ministry contexts across North America, engaging with spiritual classics in community by the year 2030. Will you join this growing community as we pursue God together by reading and discussing spiritual classics with gospel friends and kingdom coworkers.

A larger dream also informs Sacred Roots—a dream that imagines a million Christian workers equipped to serve among the global poor (Matt 9:36–38). The Center for the Study of Global Christianity reports that in the middle of 2020 there were approximately two and a half billion people living in urban poverty.³ This number will increase to over four billion by the year 2050. Sacred Roots dreams of equipping one million Christian leaders among this great multitude—women and men like Prince Kaboo—with access to excellent editions of some of the greatest spiritual classics the Christian tradition has produced. Ultimately, the goal is increased faithfulness as leaders mature in representing Christ in local churches that are centered on Scripture, grounded in Nicene truth, and

3 For the most current statistics, see www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/resources/status-of-global-christianity/.

engaged in contextually relevant witness to Christ's love in thousands of diverse contexts.⁴

Our Strategy:

Scripture, Friendship and Spiritual Classics

Sacred Roots's strategy is simple. We believe fresh readings of Christian spiritual classics can lead Christian leaders into a deeper engagement with the God revealed in Scripture and into deeper friendships with one another.

Christian spiritual classics strengthen and deepen our roots in Scripture and help us produce the Spirit's fruit. One day Jesus asked a serious student of the Bible a simple question, "*How do you read it?*" (Luke 10:26). Of the more than three hundred questions asked by Jesus in the Gospels, few are more relevant today. Faithfulness in our generation demands that we learn to read Scripture in a way consistent with the foundational truths held by followers of Jesus in every culture since the first century. We read Christian spiritual classics to discover faithful and fruitful readings of Scripture. As Dr. Don Davis has noted, the church's "Great Tradition" perennially opens our eyes to new riches in Scripture's "Authoritative Tradition."⁵

A truth believed by all Christians, in all places, and at all times is that there is one God who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From "before to beyond time," an eternal friendship between the Trinity's three persons has existed at the center of reality. Spiritual friendship provides the

4 Don Davis, *Sacred Roots: A Primer on Retrieving the Great Tradition* (Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2010), 35–45.

5 Ibid.

start and heart of truth. Just as spiritual classics can reveal new riches from Scripture, so they can help us grow in love for God and neighbors. They can provide practical help in deepening our friendships with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and with other believers—both with believers in this generation and with those surrounding us in the great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1; 13:7). Why do Christian leaders desperately need to pursue strong friendships? Start with these three reasons.

1. First, each of us has eyes far too small to see what God wants to show us! No one can begin to grasp the great things God is doing across 100 billion galaxies and throughout the many generations since the universe's creation. Friends, standing in different places provides additional eyes to see from different perspectives what God is doing in the world and across history.
2. Second, each of us battles a sinful nature that distorts our perception of the truth. We need friends who speak truth to us, sharpening us like iron sharpening iron (Prov 27:17).
3. Third, all of us view creation through a particular culture's time and place. Each culture exists with a unique version of virtue and vice. Friends who speak to us from other cultures and centuries often affirm virtues in our culture, but they can also reflect ways our culture's vice habitually offends against kingdom *shalom*.

In sum, Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics can help us grow in our friendship with God and neighbor (Matt 22:37–40). Neighbors include the living Christian leaders with

whom we read and discuss this spiritual classic. However, “neighbor” also includes the author (or authors) of this spiritual classic. These women and men walked faithfully with God and neighbor. Their life and teachings produced good fruit in their generation and then continued to do so in the lives of other Christian leaders—often across many cultures and centuries. As an editorial team, we can personally testify to the fruitfulness of the time we have spent with our “friends,” the “ancient witnesses” in the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics. If you choose to invest in careful conversation with these saints of old (Heb 13:7), we are confident you will not only experience practical fruit in the present, but you will also gain new friends for eternity.

Tactical Notes: Christian Leaders Are Christian Readers

Throughout church history, fruitful Christian leaders have been intentional readers. Augustine (d. 430), a pastor and bishop in Africa, was challenged to a new level of ministry by reading a spiritual biography about an Egyptian Christian leader named Anthony (d. 356).⁶ Protestant leaders like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Elizabeth Fry, Phoebe Palmer, and many others all published editions of spiritual classics for Christian leaders in their generation. Charles Harrison Mason (d. 1961), founder of the largest Pentecostal denomination in North America (Church of God in Christ), was called to ministry through a reading of the autobiography of missionary and

6 Athanasius of Alexandria, *Renewal in Christ: Athanasius on the Christian Life*, ed. Jeremy Treat, Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics 6 (Upland, IN: Samuel Morris Publications, 2024).

evangelist Amanda Smith.⁷ More recently, leaders like C. S. Lewis, A. W. Tozer, James Houston, and Rick Warren have encouraged Christian leaders to read wisely, especially choosing Christian spiritual classics.⁸

How to Read the Text

Plan your reading. Reading a spiritual classic is a bit like reading your Bible. You can read it anywhere or anytime, but there are times and places that will position you to better receive insight and truth. SRSC readers tend to read each spiritual classic several times, and many will “read” it in both written and audiobook versions. We read to hear what the original author of the text is saying and to understand what the Holy Spirit might be directing our attention to hear or reflect upon. On your day of rest (Sabbath), reserve some time to read or at least set aside some time to plan when you will read from your spiritual classic that week. If you have a daily commute, perhaps use some of the time to listen and reflect on an audible version of the SRSC.

Work your reading plan. Once you have planned to read your spiritual classic, begin with the Introduction. The introduction is written by a contemporary friend with significant ministry experience. This friend has spent much time reading and getting to know the spiritual classic and the author who wrote it. Often, the introduction is written

7 Amanda Smith, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist; Containing an Account of Her Life Work of Faith, and Her Travels in America, England, Ireland, Scotland, India, and Africa, as an Independent Missionary* (Chicago: Meyer, 1893).

8 Explore the essays in Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel, eds., *Reading the Christian Spiritual Classics: A Guide for Evangelicals* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013).

by someone who has read the spiritual classic dozens of times. The introduction will help you get the most out of your first several readings of the text.

After reading the Introduction, notice that all Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are divided into eight **Chapters**. These chapters are not always of equal length, but they all are weighty enough to engage your head, heart, and hands as well as your habitat and habits. Following the eight chapters, every SRSC includes a short section called *Continuing the Conversation*. If you enjoyed reading the spiritual classic, then *Continuing the Conversation* will help you discover more resources to engage the author(s) of the spiritual classic.

The Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are divided into ten parts to make it easier to talk about the text with friends and coworkers. The table below provides four examples of how to read a SRSC with a group of friends. When friends commit to read and discuss a SRSC together, the group is called a Sacred Roots Study Group.

SRSC Section to Read	“Sunday School” Class	“Church-Based Seminary” Module	Monthly Pastor’s Meeting	Quarterly Retreat Discussion Group
	Ten Weeks	Eight Weeks	Monthly	Quarterly
Introduction	Week 1	Week 1	Month 1	Read text before retreat and then discuss
Ch. 1	Week 2			
Ch. 2	Week 3			
Ch. 3	Week 4	Week 2	Month 2	
Ch. 4	Week 5	Week 3		
Ch. 5	Week 6	Week 4		
Ch. 6	Week 7	Week 5		
Ch. 7	Week 8	Week 6	Month 3	
Ch. 8	Week 9	Week 7		
Afterword Resources for Application	Week 10			

Review your reading. The best readers, like the best leaders, do more than make a plan and work it. They also pause to take time to review their work—or in this case—their reading.⁹ Robert Clinton has noted that only around 25

⁹ The PWR (Plan, Work, Review) process is explained further by Don Allsman, *The Heroic Venture: A Parable of Project Leadership* (Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry

percent of leaders in the Bible finished well.¹⁰ If we hope to finish well in our generation we must learn to *attend* to our habitat, our head, our heart, our hands, and our habits. To *attend* means to pay attention, to apply our self, to prioritize and to value something enough to give it our time and our energy. Each chapter concludes with five types of questions aimed at helping you review your progress toward finishing well and hearing Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:23).



Habitat? Habitat questions ask us to pause and look around at our environment, our culture, our generation, our nationality, and the things that make up the *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the times).

Questions may ask about the author’s habitat or our own. Since the SRSC were written across many centuries and cultures, they often help us notice aspects of our culture needing attention.



Head? Auguste Rodin’s sculpture known as *The Thinker* sits before an 18-foot-tall sculpture called *The Gates of Hell*. The massive sculptural group reflects Rodin’s engagement with a

spiritual classic by Dante, *The Divine Comedy*. Head questions require serious intellectual engagement as you talk with friends about the author’s ideas, claims, and proposals.



Heart? In August of 1541, John Calvin wrote a letter to a friend with this promise: “When I remember that I am not my own, I offer up my heart presented as a sacrifice to God.” Calvin’s

Institute, 2006).

10 Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*, Rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 185–87.

personal seal expressed this sincere desire. God not only owns our mind, but also our will and emotions. Heart questions will help you attend to the people and things to which you give your loves.



Hands? Albrecht Dürer sketched a drawing called *Study of the Hands of an Apostle* in the year 1508. The apostles were men of action, yet Dürer portrays the apostle's hands in prayer. The action to which SRSC call us are often surprising. Hands questions will challenge you to evaluate carefully what action you are to take after a particular reading.



Habits? Charlotte Mason (d. 1923) was a master teacher. She believed Christian formation must carefully attend to habit formation. Like laying railroad tracks, habit formation is hard work. But once laid, great work requires little effort just as railroad cars run smoothly on tracks. Habits questions challenge you to reflect on small daily or weekly actions that form your character and the character of those around you.

Reading with Friends

The Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are not meant to be read alone; indeed, it is impossible to do so. Every time we open a SRSC we read a book that *has been read* by thousands of Christian leaders in previous generations, *is being read* by thousands of Christian leaders in our generation, and *will be read* (if the return of Christ tarries) by thousands of Christian leaders in generations after us. The readers before us have already finished their race. These thousands of Christian leaders read the text in hundreds of different cultures and across dozens of different generations. All these “friends”

read this text with you now. As you read the SRSC, imagine yourself talking about *Benedict's Rule* (SRSC 2) with the reformer Martin Luther; or picture yourself discussing Madam Guyon's *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* with the missionary Amy Carmichael. Remember you never read a Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic alone.

However, it is not just leaders who have gone before, it is also leaders in the present with whom you must imagine reading this SRSC. Whatever benefit you find in reading will be doubled when you share it with a friend. Whatever trouble or difficulty you find in reading the text will be halved when you share it with a friend. Resolve to never read a Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic alone.

Perhaps you have noticed that the word “generation” has already appeared in this preface more than fifteen times? The SRSC represent the work of many generations working together. Five generations of evangelicals have worked and prayed together on this project since its public commencement in 2018. But these five generations of living evangelicals represent only a small sample of the many generations who have tested the faithfulness and fruitfulness of the SRSC. Why does this matter? In part, it matters because these texts are treasures to use and then pass on to the next generation of leaders. Recognize the emerging leaders God has called you to serve and steward—share the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics with them.

Careful readers of Scripture know that the most influential leaders among God's people have always worked in teams. King David's teams became legends—“the three,” “the thirty.” The list of Paul's missionary and ministry team members whose names we know from the New Testament

runs to nearly one hundred. Our Sacred Roots team of teams prays that this text will be a blessing and a reliable resource for you and your gospel friends as you pursue kingdom business together.

Grace and Peace,

Don, Uche, Greg, May, Ryan, Isaiah, and Hank

The Nicene Creed with Scriptural Support

The Urban Ministry Institute

We believe in one God,

Deut 6:4–5; Mark 12:29; 1 Cor 8:6

the Father Almighty,

Gen 17:1; Dan 4:35; Matt 6:9; Eph 4:6; Rev 1:8

Maker of heaven and earth

Gen 1:1; Isa 40:28; Rev 10:6

and of all things visible and invisible.

Ps 148; Rom 11:36; Rev 4:11

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father,

John 1:1–2; 3:18; 8:58; 14:9–10; 20:28; Col 1:15, 17; Heb 1:3–6

through whom all things were made.

John 1:3; Col 1:16

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human.

Matt 1:20–23; Luke 19:10; John 1:14; 6:38

Who for us too, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried.

Matt 27:1–2; Mark 15:24–39, 43–47; Acts 13:29; Rom 5:8; Heb 2:10; 13:12

The third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,

Mark 16:5–7; Luke 24:6–8; Acts 1:3; Rom 6:9; 10:9; 2 Tim 2:8

ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Mark 16:19; Eph 1:19–20

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his Kingdom will have no end.

Isa 9:7; Matt 24:30; John 5:22; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Rom 14:9; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver,

Gen 1:1–2; Job 33:4; Pss 104:30; 139:7–8; Luke 4:18–19; John 3:5–6; Acts 1:1–2; 1 Cor 2:11; Rev 3:22

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

John 14:16–18, 26; 15:26; 20:22

who together with the Father and Son is worshiped and glorified,

Isa 6:3; Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Rev 4:8

who spoke by the prophets.

Num 11:29; Mic 3:8; Acts 2:17–18; 2 Pet 1:21

We believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Matt 16:18; 1 Cor 1:2; 10:17; Eph 5:25–28; 1 Tim 3:15; Rev 7:9

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sin,

Acts 22:16; Eph 4:4–5; 1 Pet 3:21

And we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come.

Isa 11:6–10; Mic 4:1–7; Luke 18:29–30; Rev 21:1–5; 21:22–22:5

Amen.

Memory Verses

Below are suggested memory verses, one for each section of the Creed.

The Father

Rev 4:11 — Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

The Son

John 1:1 — In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The Son's Mission

1 Cor 15:3–5 — For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

The Holy Spirit

Rom 8:11 — If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

The Church

1 Pet 2:9 — But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Our Hope

1 Thess 4:16–17 — For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

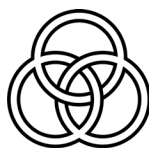
From Before to Beyond Time: The Plan of God and Human History

Adapted from Suzanne de Dietrich. *God's Unfolding Purpose*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.

I. Before Time (Eternity Past)

1 Cor 2:7 – But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory (cf. Titus 1:2).

- A. The Eternal Triune God
- B. God's Eternal Purpose
- C. The Mystery of Iniquity
- D. The Principalities and Powers



II. Beginning of Time (Creation and Fall)

Gen 1:1 – In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

- A. Creative Word
- B. Humanity
- C. Fall
- D. Reign of Death and First Signs of Grace



III. Unfolding of Time (God's Plan Revealed through Israel)

Gal 3:8 – And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed" (cf. Rom 9:4–5).

- A. Promise (Patriarchs)
- B. Exodus and Covenant at Sinai
- C. Promised Land
- D. The City, the Temple, and the Throne
(Prophet, Priest, and King)
- E. Exile
- F. Remnant



IV. Fullness of Time (Incarnation of the Messiah)

Gal 4:4–5 – But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

- A. The King Comes to His Kingdom
- B. The Present Reality of His Reign
- C. The Secret of the Kingdom:
the Already and the Not Yet
- D. The Crucified King
- E. The Risen Lord



V. The Last Times (The Descent of the Holy Spirit)

Acts 2:16–18 – But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: “And in the last days it shall be,” God declares, “that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.”

- A. Between the Times: the Church as
Foretaste of the Kingdom
- B. The Church as Agent of the Kingdom
- C. The Conflict Between the Kingdoms
of Darkness and Light



VI. The Fulfillment of Time (The Second Coming)

Matt 13:40–43 – Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

- A. The Return of Christ
- B. Judgment
- C. The Consummation of His Kingdom



VII. Beyond Time (Eternity Future)

1 Cor 15:24–28 – Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

- A. Kingdom Handed Over
to God the Father
- B. God as All in All



About the Sacred Roots Project

Sacred Roots seeks to equip and empower under-resourced congregational leaders in urban, rural, and incarcerated communities. One avenue for accomplishing this goal is the Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics, a series of abridged Christian spiritual classics that equip congregational leaders to engage the wealth of the Great Tradition.

The Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics include:

Praying the Psalms with Augustine and Friends

Edited by Carmen Joy Imes

Becoming a Community of Disciples:

Guidelines from Abbot Benedict and Bishop Basil

Benedict of Nursia and Basil of Caesarea, edited by
Greg Peters

Spiritual Friendship:

Learning How to Be Friends with God and One Another

Aelred of Rievaulx, edited by Hank Voss

Christian Mission and Poverty:

Wisdom from 2,000 Years of Church Leaders

Edited by Andrew T. Draper

Books Jesus Read: Learning from the Apocrypha

Edited by Robert F. Lay

Renewal in Christ: Athanasius on the Christian Life

Athanasius of Alexandria, edited by Jeremy Treat

First Christian Voices: Practices of the Apostolic Fathers

Edited by Michael Cooper

Las Casas on Faithful Witness

Bartolomé de las Casas, edited by Robert Chao Romero and Marcos Canales

Reading the Bible Spiritually:

Guidance from Guigo II, Reformers, and Puritans

Edited by Greg Peters

The Pursuit of God

A. W. Tozer, edited by Glen G. Scorgie

Pulpit Spirituality:

Jonathan Edwards on Soul Work and Soul Care

Jonathan Edwards, edited by Kyle Strobel and Kenneth P. Minkema

Mission with Prophetic Power:

The Journal of John Woolman

John Woolman, edited by Evan B. Howard

Reading the Bible to Meet Jesus:

Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching

Irenaeus of Lyons, edited by Gregory S. MaGee

Killing Sin:

Lessons on Holiness from John Owen and Phoebe Palmer

John Owen and Phoebe Palmer, edited by Daniel Hill

The Interior Castle:

Learning to Pray with Teresa of Ávila

Teresa of Ávila, edited by Nancy Reyes Frazier

God Is Faithful Still:

The Autobiography of George Müller

George Müller, edited by Uche Anizor

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The Sacred Roots Spiritual Classics are dedicated to all Christian leaders who have loved the poor and recognized the importance of Christian spiritual classics for nurturing the next generation. We especially recognize these fourteen:

John Wesley (1703–1791)

Rebecca Protten (1718–1780)

Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845)

Phoebe Palmer (1807–1874)

Dora Yu (1873–1931)

A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

Howard Thurman (1899–1981)

Watchman Nee (1903–1972)

James Houston (1922–)

J. I. Packer (1926–2020)

Tom Oden (1931–2016)

René Padilla (1932–2021)

Dallas Willard (1935–2013)

Bruce Demarest (1935–2021)

Remember your leaders,
those who spoke to you the word of God.
Consider the outcome of their way of life,
and imitate their faith.

~ Hebrews 13:7



THEOLOGY & ETHICS



Scripture Index

Genesis

1:1, 75, 205, 209
1:1–2, 206
1:6–7, 89
1:9, 89
1:11, 89
1:14–15, 89
1:24, 89
1:29–30, 89
3:8–10, 47, 75
3:19, 90
16:13, 107
17:1, 205
21:12, 37
22:2, 37
22:16–18, 38
28:16, 76

Exodus

3:1–4:17, 53
3:14, 117
4:22, 96
13:21–22, 53
25–27, 48
33:13, 26
33:18, 26, 27
34:5, 76
35–40, 48

Numbers

11:29, 206
18:20, 29
21:6, 102
21:8–9, 103

Deuteronomy

6:4–5, 205

32:10, 76

Judges

5:20, 120

1 Samuel

2–3, 122

2:30, 122

15, 117

17, 191

1 Kings

8:27, 75

18, 18

2 Chronicles

2:6, 47

Nehemiah

9:6–38, 190

Job

33:4, 206

Psalms

1:2, 173

16:11, 162

21:6, 162

23, 167

27:4, 162, 167

27:8, 80

33:6, 89

33:9, 89

34:5, 103

34:8, 64, 65

42, 53

42:1–2, 21

45:8, 65

46:10, 94, 165, 166

51, 191

57:2, 189

57:5, 115

63:8, 20, 21

78, 190

90:1, 189

90:3, 90

104:30, 206

105, 190

106, 190

123:1–2, 103

131:2, 166

136, 190

139:7, 73, 75

139:7–8, 206

139:8–10, 75

148, 205

Proverbs

8:1–4, 91
27:17, 196

Song of Songs

2:14, 57

Isaiah

6:1–3, 54
6:3, 146, 206
9:7, 206
11:6–10, 206
14:13, 106
40:28, 205

Jeremiah

6:9, 96

Daniel

3, 190
4:35, 205

Hosea

6:3, ix

Micah

3:8, 206
4:1–7, 206

Zechariah

8:23, 96

Matthew

1:5, 191
1:20–23, 205
5–7, 130
5:3, 33, 35
5:5, 130
5:8, 65
5:27–28, 144
6:9, 64, 205
6:10, 189
6:25–34, 166
9:35, 194
9:36, 192
9:36–38, 194
11:28, 137
11:28–30, 121, 131, 166
13:40–43, 210
14:19, 105
16:18, 206
16:24, 35
16:24–25, 35
16:25, 38
18:3, 135
21:9, 141
22:37–40, 196
24:30, 206
25:23, 201
26:36–46, 37
27:1–2, 205
28:19, 206

Mark

12:29, 205
15:24–39, 205
16:5–7, 206
16:19, 206

Luke

4:18–19, 206
5:8, 47
10:21, 28
10:26, 195
10:41–42, 162
15:11–32, 116
15:18, 48
18:29–30, 206
19:10, 205
19:31, 141
24:6–8, 206

John

1:1, 87, 207
1:1–2, 205
1:3, 205
1:9, 90
1:14, 205
1:29, 105
3:5–6, 206
3:14–15, 103
3:18, 205

4:21–24, 144
5:19–21, 105
5:22, 206
5:44, 123
6:38, 205
6:44, 21
8:29, 139
8:34, 121
8:49, 123
8:54, 123
8:58, 205
10:27, 65
12:6, 189
12:26, 122
12:29, 91
14–17, 191
14:1, 71
14:9–10, 205
14:16–18, 206
14:21–23, 72
14:26, 206
14:27, 166
15, 189
15:9, 167
15:11, 162
15:16, 165
15:26, 206
17:3, 24, 108
20:22, 206
20:28, 205

Acts

1:1–2, 206
1:3, 206
1:8, 192
1:11, 206
2:1–4, 53
2:16–18, 210
2:17–18, 206
13:29, 205
13:36, 189, 191
17:27, 52
17:27–28, 75
17:31, 206
20:9, 3
22:16, 206

Romans

1:20, 90
2:15, 90
5:8, 205
6:9, 206
6:13, 190
8, 190
8:11, 207
9:4–5, 209
10:8, 106
10:9, 206
11:36, 205
14:5, 144
14:5–8, 109
14:9, 206
14:20, 144

1 Corinthians

1:2, 206
2:7, 209
2:11, 206
4:1, 191
4:7, 41
8:6, 205
10:17, 206
10:31, 137, 140
11:1, 172
15:3–5, 207
15:24–28, 211

2 Corinthians

3:13–16, 57
5:1, 138
5:10, 206
13:14, 206

Galatians

3:8, 209
4:4–5, 210
5–6, 190

Ephesians

1:19–20, 206
4:4–5, 206
4:6, 205
5:25–28, 206
6:10–20, 164

Philippians

3:8, 26
3:10, 26
4:6–7, 166

Colossians

1:15, 205
1:16, 205
1:17, 205
1:20, 93
2:16, 109

1 Thessalonians

4:16–17, 208
5:19–21, 173

1 Timothy

3:15, 206

2 Timothy

2:8, 206
4:1, 206

Titus

1:2, 209

Hebrews

1:3–6, 205
2:10, 205
10:19, 45
11, 190
11:1, 102
11:3, 89
11:6, 71
11:19, 37
11:35, 191
12:1, 196
12:2, 99, 105
12:18–24, 72
13:7, 158, 196, 197, 216
13:12, 205
13:17a, 157

James

2:25, 191

1 Peter

2:9, 207
3:21, 206
5:7, 166

2 Peter

1:21, 100, 206

Revelation

1:8, 205

3:22, 206

4:8, 206

4:11, 46, 119, 205, 207

7:9, 206

7:14, 81

10:6, 205

21:1–5, 206

21:22–22:5, 206



When I first read *The Pursuit of God* as a green Bible college student, I was in over my head. Now decades later, when I read it again as a seasoned Christian leader, I was in over my heart. It has incited in me a deeper, heartfelt longing fused with a wider, acute understanding of what it means to cultivate intimacy with God and experience his manifest Presence. As editor of this Sacred Roots Spiritual Classic, Dr. Glen Scorgie is an astute guide who interprets and applies Tozer for twenty-first century readers. His introduction, Scripture updates, footnotes, end-of-chapter discussion questions (especially useful for small groups), and afterword will fuel your pursuit of God. Following Dr. Scorgie's advice, I intend to practice recollection—reviewing what I read and inviting the Holy Spirit to incorporate it into my life. I highly recommend this classic!

~ **Roger Helland, DMin,**
Prayer Ambassador, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada,
Author of *Pursuing God's Presence* and *The Devout Life*



Glen G. Scorgie (PhD, University of St. Andrews) is Professor Emeritus of Theology at Bethel Seminary. He is the general editor of the Dictionary of Christian Spirituality (2011) and for the past quarter century has been involved in the ministries of a Chinese church in San Diego, California. He had a personal childhood connection to A. W. Tozer.