



A.W. TOZER

EDITED by JAMES L. SNYDER

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Introduction

I was fifteen years old when first introduced to *The Pursuit of God*. A retired missionary in our congregation approached me one Sunday, and I noticed she had a book in hand.

“Young man,” she said rather soberly, “here is a book I think you ought to read.”

She thrust the book into my hands and disappeared. I looked at the book; it was *The Pursuit of God* by a man I had heard my pastor quote quite often, Dr. A.W. Tozer.

The woman had probably overheard me say I enjoyed reading. What she had *not* heard was that I enjoyed reading novels, not books by preachers. Reading a book by some dead minister was not on my to-do list. I liked preachers, but I just did not think at the time they had much relevance in my life. For the most part, preachers preached over my head. At least, I used that excuse at the time. But I brought the book home and, frankly, forgot about it.

The next Sunday this same missionary was waiting for me as I entered the church.

“Did you read the book? How did you like the book?”

At first I did not know what she was talking about, and then it dawned on me: She had given me a book the previous Sunday. I shook my head and told her I really did not have time to read during the week, what with school and all.

The following Sunday the same scenario took place.

“Did you read the book? How did you like the book?”

My response was the same as the week before. This went on for several weeks until it occurred to me: If I wanted to have to face this retired missionary every Sunday as I walked into the church, I would let things stand as they were and avoid the book. However, if I wanted to get this over with, I needed to at least read the first chapter. I thought that would satisfy her and then I could go on with life.

So I found *The Pursuit of God* and began reading it. That was the end of my life as I knew it. I was amazed by what I read. Up until this point, I had believed that any book written by a preacher would be too theologically sophisticated and full of religious jargon for me to understand. However, much to my delight, Tozer’s teaching was simple and clear. Here was a man writing on *my* level and teaching things about God in such a manner that I understood what he was saying.

The following Sunday, the retired missionary stood waiting at the church door for me. When she saw me, and my smile, she knew. She knew that not only had I read the book, but the book had read *me*.

I did something then that I do not do as a rule even now: I hugged her and said, “Thanks for the book. I did read it and I do love it.” She smiled and told me her prayers had been answered. After that, every time I saw her in church, she nodded and smiled my way.

Since then I have read *The Pursuit of God* more times than I can remember. The discovery of this book started me on a journey with God I am still pursuing today, and reading works from Tozer became a lifelong habit.

After high school I attended a small Bible institute to train for the ministry; one professor required us to write a biographical essay on an author who had powerfully influenced our lives up to that point. For me there was no question about it: A.W. Tozer.

When I wrote that essay, I discovered that there was very little biographical material written on Tozer. One book by David Fant, *A. W. Tozer: A Twentieth-Century Prophet*, had a biographical profile in the first chapter, and the remainder of the book contained quotes from the ministry and writings of Dr. Tozer. However, no official biography of Tozer existed.

During the course of my pastoral ministry, whenever I met someone who knew anything of Dr. Tozer, I peppered that person with questions. I began taking notes, but not with any idea of writing a biography. After all, I was not a writer at the time, and writing a book is a major undertaking. I just wanted all the material I could find about Dr. Tozer for my own information; and as I began collecting, my file grew delightfully larger.

I also began collecting Tozer's audio sermons. I built an impressive library and listened to these sermons regularly, enjoying them every time.

Around this time I met a woman who had devoted her life to collecting the sermons of Tozer. Some of the sermons were on the old reel-to-reel tapes, so together we put them on cassette tapes. Later, of course, they needed to be transferred to a digital format.

Eventually, I had amassed about six hundred audio sermons of Dr. Tozer's. Rarely a week went by without my listening to at least one of these sermons.

It wasn't long before I started thinking about a biography, and I began writing biographical essays. The first magazine to buy an article on A.W. Tozer was the *Fundamentalist Journal*, founded by the late Dr. Jerry Falwell. Several other magazines also bought articles on the life of Tozer. *Alliance Life* magazine published one of my articles, which caught the attention of a publisher.

Soon the publisher contacted me and said they thought there was a market for an A.W. Tozer biography. This, of course, thrilled me, and I began seriously working the material I had collected into a book proposal.

In my research of Dr. Tozer's life, I became acquainted with one of Tozer's friends, Paris Reidhead (1919–1992). I lived about an hour from him and spent quite a bit of time in his study. He became a marvelous and wonderful friend. He even filled my pulpit when I was away. I later learned that he never did this for anybody else.

One day as I was sitting in his study—I am not sure what we were discussing at the time—he paused, and I noticed a faraway look in his eye. He stared at me for a long moment. Finally, he said, “Brother, if you really want to understand Tozer and appreciate his passion for God, let me make a suggestion to you. Read the three definitive books of Tozer in the order in which he wrote them.”

Of course, he was referring to *The Pursuit of God*, *The Divine Conquest* (retitled *The Pursuit of Man*), and *The Knowledge of the Holy*. There are forty-three chapters in these three books. I took Reidhead’s suggestion seriously and set out to read one chapter per day until I had read all three books in the order in which they were written.

Reidhead cautioned, “Don’t read these books like you are reading a novel. Read them slowly, meditatively, and try to enter into the spirit in which these books were written. And, as Tozer did, always seek the face of God as you read.”

Reading through these three books was an amazing experience. I had to discipline myself and only read one chapter per day, Monday through Friday. For someone who is a compulsive reader, this was very difficult, and yet I managed to do it.

At the end of my reading, I was so encouraged that I decided to read the collection once more. As I began the second reading of these three books, an idea came to me: *Why not listen to an audio sermon before I read a chapter?* In this way, I believed, I would more fully understand the message Tozer was trying to convey.

I did not know that I was starting a wonderful tradition in my own devotional life. The second time of reading through the three books and listening to the messages of A.W. Tozer, I began to understand him, as Reidhead predicted, and to appreciate the direction in which these books were going.

Since that time, I have made reading and listening to Tozer a spiritual discipline in my own life. Occasionally I will take a week or a month off, but soon I am anxious to return to my in-depth study of Tozer's work. In reading these books, I have found that, no matter where I am in my Christian development, there is always something appropriate and nourishing within their pages for my inner life.

In the introduction to *The Pursuit of God*, Tozer writes, "This book is a modest attempt to aid God's hungry children so to find Him." This, I believe, is the beginning of our journey as believers. In *The Divine Conquest*, Dr. Tozer says, "I expect to show that if we would know the power of the Christian message our nature must be invaded by an Object from beyond it; that That which is external must become internal; that the objective Reality which is God must cross the threshold of our personality and take residence within."¹

In the third book in this devotional trilogy, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, Tozer explains, "It is my hope that this small book may contribute somewhat to the promotion of personal heart religion among us; and should a few persons by reading it be encouraged to begin the practice of reverent meditation on the being of God, that will more than repay the labor required to use it."²

How to Read the Pursuit of God

Tozer was an enthusiastic admirer of François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, the seventeenth-century French saint whose eloquent sermons contributed greatly to the spiritual education of his contemporaries and whose generosity did much to mitigate the sufferings caused by the War of the Spanish Succession. Fénelon was a man who knew God, who lived in Him as a bird lives in the air. Providentially, he was endowed with the ability to lead others into the same kind of life. In Fénelon, there was no trace of the morbidity that has marked some of the men and women who have been known as mystics.

When Harper & Row republished *Christian Counsel* by Fénelon as *Christian Perfection*, Tozer was thrilled. He wrote an article to exhort *Alliance Witness* readers to purchase it. He said,

Come [to the book] with a spirit of longing. Without strong desire nothing will do you much good. Be determined to know God.

Read only after prayer and meditation on the Word itself. The heart must be readied for this book, otherwise it will be like any other and have little effect.

Come in an attitude of devotion, in silence and humble expectation. If possible, get alone to read. The presence of even the dearest friend often distracts the heart and prevents complete concentration.

Get surrendering and consecrating done before coming to Fénelon; he begins where others leave off.

Be in earnest. Fénelon assumes the seriousness of his readers. If anyone should be infected with the strange notion that religion should afford amusement as well as salvation, let him pass Fénelon by. This book is for the person who thirsts after God. . . .

Never read more than one chapter a day. It would be a mistake to hurry through the book. It is to be studied, meditated on, marked, prayed over, and returned to as often and as long as it continues to minister to the soul.³

Tozer's admonition about reading Fénelon can easily be transferred to *The Pursuit of God*. Taking Tozer's advice will go far in meditating upon this book at hand.

A Spiritual Mentor

In the stormy world of Christianity in which we live today, Tozer stands out as a reliable, faithful spiritual mentor. Such mentors are drastically needed yet rarely found.

Tozer once said, "Never honor a man until after he is dead. The last year of his life he may do things that will completely destroy any good he has done up to that point." Of course, he was saying this with tongue in cheek humor. But there is a point to it. If a small percentage of that is true, then I suggest Tozer qualifies as an able and valuable spiritual mentor to be respected.

Over fifty years ago, A.W. Tozer went home to be with the Lord. Although the messenger is gone, the message still

rings loud and true. One of the amazing things about working with this material by Tozer is just how relevant he is today. At times I have to stop and remind myself that the sermon based on this book was preached in the 1950s. How did Tozer know what it was going to be like more than fifty years after his death?

Every once in a while somebody will ask me, “What would Tozer say if he were alive today?” My answer is simple: “Tozer would say today the same things he said all throughout his ministry. He did not dabble in the passing trends but instead dealt with the eternal realities of God’s truth—and that never changes.”

In many ways, the Church today is as dysfunctional as Tozer predicted it would be. And the solution is the same as it was fifty years ago, one hundred years ago, one thousand years ago, and all the way back to the early Church.

The solution for today’s Church is simply Jesus Christ. To know Him in the fullness of His glory was the great passion of A.W. Tozer. If we are going to overcome the problems we are facing today, it will be because we have entered into the glory of Jesus and the essence of His power through the Holy Spirit.

My prayer for this definitive classic edition of *The Pursuit of God* is that a new generation will discover its message and see it ignite their passion for God.

James L. Snyder

Preface

In this hour of all-but-universal darkness one cheering gleam appears: Within the fold of conservative 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 athirst for God, and they will not be satisfied till they have drunk deep at the Fountain of Living Water.

This is the only real harbinger 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. 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 athirst 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 breasts a longing which their teaching simply does not satisfy.

I trust I speak in charity, but the lack in our pulpits is real. Milton’s terrible sentence applies to our day as accurately as it did to his: “The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.”¹ 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 but a very slender part of religion. . . . Though right tempers cannot subsist without right opinion, yet right opinion 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 it.”²

Thanks to our splendid Bible societies and to other effective agencies for the dissemination 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.

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 a 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 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 men 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

Preface

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 further 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.

A. W. Tozer

Chicago, Illinois, June 16, 1948

1

Following Hard After God

My soul followeth hard after thee: thy
right hand upholdeth me.

Psalm 63:8

Christian theology teaches the doctrine of “prevenient grace,” which briefly stated means this: that before a man can seek God, God must first have sought the man.

Before a sinful man can think a right thought of God, there must have been a work of enlightenment done within him; 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 man can come to me,” said our Lord, “except the Father which hath sent me draw 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: “Thy right hand upholdeth me.”

In this divine “upholding” and human “following” there is no contradiction. All is of God, for as von Hügel teaches, God is always previous. In practice, however, (that is, where God’s previous working meets man’s present response) man must pursue God. On our part there must be positive reciprocation if this secret drawing of God is to eventuate in identifiable experience of the Divine. In the warm language of personal feeling this is stated in the forty-second psalm: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (vv. 1–2). This is deep calling unto deep, and the longing heart will understand it.

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 men 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 man is “saved,” but he is not hungry nor thirsty after God. In fact, he is 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. 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 intercourse that the full possibilities of both can be explored.

All social intercourse between human beings is a response of personality to personality, grading upward from the most casual brush between man and man 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 life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast 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 man is the throbbing heart of New Testament religion.

This intercourse 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 who 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 man can “know” it as he knows 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 quickened 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. That is where we begin, I say, but where we stop no man has yet discovered, for there is in the awful and mysterious depths of the triune God neither limit nor end.

Majesty Divine

Shoreless Ocean! who shall sound Thee?
Thine own eternity is round Thee,
Majesty Divine!

Frederick W. Faber (1814–1863)

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. St. Bernard stated this holy paradox in a musical quatrain that will be instantly understood by every worshipping soul:

Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts!

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.

Bernard of Clairvaux
(circa 1090–1153), translated
by Ray Palmer (1808–1887)

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 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 thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight” (Exodus 33:13); and from there he rose to make the daring request, “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory” (v. 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” (Philippians 3:10) was the goal of his heart, and to this he sacrificed everything. “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (v. 8).

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,”¹ sang our fathers only a short generation ago, but that song is heard no more in the great congregation. 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 souls. We have been snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found Him, we

need no more 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 worshipping, 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 Rutherford, or a Brainerd.

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, “O God, show me thy glory.” 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. Complacency 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 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 servile 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 discovers Himself to “babes” 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 guileless candor 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. “Lift up thine heart unto God with a meek stirring of love; and mean Himself, and none of His goods. And thereto, look thee loath to think

on aught but Himself. So that nought work in thy wit, nor in thy will, but only Himself. . . . This is the work of the soul that most pleaseth God.”²

Again, he recommends that in prayer we practice a further stripping down of everything, even of our theology. “For it sufficeth enough, a naked intent direct unto God without any other cause than Himself.”³ Yet underneath all his thinking lies the broad foundation of New Testament truth, for he explains that by “Himself” he means “God that made thee and bought thee, and that graciously hath called thee to thy degree.”⁴ And he is all for simplicity: If we would have religion “lapped and folden in one word, for that thou shouldest have better hold thereupon, take thee but a little word of one syllable: for so it is better than of two, for ever the shorter it is the better it accordeth with the work of the Spirit. And such a word is this word GOD or this word LOVE.”⁵

When the Lord divided Canaan among the tribes of Israel, Levi received no share of the land. God said to him simply, “I am thy part and thine inheritance” (Numbers 18:20), and by those words made him richer than all his brethren, richer than all the kings and rajas 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.

The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One. Many ordinary treasures may be denied him, or if he is allowed to have them, the enjoyment of them will be so tempered that they will never be necessary to his happiness. Or if he must see them go, one after one, he will scarcely

feel a sense of loss, for having the Source of all things he has in One all satisfaction, all pleasure, all delight. Whatever he may lose, he has actually lost nothing, for he now has it all in One, and he has it purely, legitimately and forever.

O God, I have tasted Thy 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 Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee, that I may know Thee 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."⁶ Then give me grace to rise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long. In Jesus' Name, amen.