

June 2010 Growth Huddles :: “The Pursuit of God”

Chapter 1: Following Hard After God

For the director of music. A maskil of the Sons of Korah. As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. — Psalm 42:1

Tozer’s primary assertion is that the responsibility remains for each human to deeply desire and passionately pursue relationship with God. The threat is that we might settle for the knowledge about God and yet not truly *know* God.

Here are a few specific quotations:

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.

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.

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.

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 man who has God for his treasure has all things in One.

SUMMARY

- We must return to a passionate pursuit of God Himself as a Knowable Person.
- We must resist the temptations of religious complexity and pursue God in simplicity.
- We must avoid the “God-and” desires, and return to the awareness that God Alone is all we need.

QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to “pursue God”?
- Why is it necessary?

- How would you describe your own “desire” for God?
- How does religious complexity affect your pursuit of God?
- The “God-and” desires are a common temptation. Which things, activities, behaviors and thoughts are likely to distract people from pure passion for God Himself?
- Can you be truly satisfied with God alone?
- This chapter taught me that I should ...

Chapter 2: The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing

Here are some quotations:

[The things of Creation] were made for man's uses, but they were meant always to be external to the man and subservient to him. In the deep heart of the man was a shrine where none but God was worthy to come.

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.

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 thus He practiced an economy of means and time. It hurt cruelly, but it was effective.

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.

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.

SUMMARY

- The created world was made by God for our use and pleasure, but always external, subservient.
- When “things” creep into our heart, they compete with God for our allegiance and worship.
- For God to sit on the throne of our lives, we must lay claim to nothing in all creation—we do not own our time, talent, bodies, relationships or things.

QUESTIONS

- How do “things” affect you? Rank these items in order of their attractiveness to you: relationships, time, talent, possessions, activities, and accomplishment.
- What does it mean to have but not possess?
- This chapter taught me that I should ...

Chapter 3: Removing the Veil

Here are some quotations:

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.

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...

Ransomed men 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.

The instant cure of most of our religious ills would be to enter the Presence in spiritual experience...

And yet, thus to penetrate, to push in sensitive living experience into the holy Presence, is a privilege open to every child of God.

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? 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 unrepuddiated. It is the close-woven veil of the self-life which we have never truly acknowledged...

Self is the opaque veil that hides the Face of God from us

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.

SUMMARY

In his most scathing critique of the human condition, Tozer asserts that there is a veil positioned between us and God. Though we have every right as his children to enter fully into his presence, and though God himself has removed every barrier, there is yet a veil in our hearts—a veil of our uncrucified "Self" that plays out in all kinds of self-focused sins. To enter into the presence of God requires a full relinquishing of that "Self."

QUESTIONS

- What does the self-life look like among Christians today?
- What stands between you and fully entering into the presence of God in daily relationship?
- This chapter taught me that I should ...

Chapter 4: Apprehending God

... 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.

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.

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.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. — Hebrews 11:6

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.

SUMMARY

- Though the Bible clearly teaches that humans can know God on a deeply personal level, few of us do.
- The Biblical language of speech and taste and touch doesn't relate to us because the spiritual world is heard, tasted, and touched with spiritual senses, and our spiritual senses are dulled.
- Lack of faith dulls our spiritual senses, and the solution is to (1) become convinced of the reality of the spiritual world and our ability to sense it (2) refocus ourselves on the spiritual world in precedence over the material world, and (3) practice obedience to the word of Christ.

QUESTIONS

- What was one of your most profound spiritual experiences? In what ways did you experience the reality of the spiritual world?
- How aware are you of the spiritual world on a day-to-day basis?
- What role do faith and obedience play in your knowledge of the spiritual world?
- Based on this chapter, I learned that ...

Chapter 5: The Universal Presence

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? — Psalm 139:7

Quotations:

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.

Men do not know that God is here. What a difference it would make if they knew.

Speaking of the great saints of the Bible and of post-Biblical times, Tozer says:

I venture to suggest that the one vital quality which they had in common 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.

A generation of Christians reared among push buttons and automatic machines is impatient of 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.

Let any man turn to God in earnest, let him begin to exercise himself unto godliness, let him seek to develop his powers of spiritual receptivity by trust and obedience and humility, and the results will exceed anything he may have hoped in his leaner and weaker days.

Any man who by repentance and a sincere return to God will break himself out of the mold in which he has been held, and will go to the Bible itself for his spiritual standards, will be delighted with what he finds there.

SUMMARY

- God is ever-present, and there is no human being who can be said to be “far from God.”
- Our apparent distance from God is a distance of relationship born from lack of experience.
- The great saints have worked diligently at cultivating a sensitivity to the things of God.
- The promise is available to everyone that exercising godliness, trust, obedience and humility with a firm reliance on the Bible itself will produce deeper sensitivity to the presence of God.

QUESTIONS

- How would you measure your own spiritual sensitivity?
- What kinds of exercises develop spiritual sensitivity?
- Based on this chapter, I have learned that ...

Chapter 6: The Speaking Voice

[JESUS] “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.” — John 16:12-15

Quotations:

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.

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.

Could it be that this Voice distilling like a living mist upon the hearts of men 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 men have reacted to it is for any observer to note.

It is my own belief (and here I shall not feel bad if no one follows me) that every good and beautiful thing which man has produced in the world has been the result of his faulty and sin-blocked response to the creative Voice sounding over the earth.

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. 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 Saviour 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.

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.

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.

SUMMARY

- The very nature of God is to be in communication, to Speak.
- The second person of the Trinity is called "the Word" in John 1, and all creation began when "God said."
- The voice of God has been calling out to each person in history, and we have all responded to him differently.
- Ultimately and authoritatively, God has spoken and is speaking in and through the Bible.
- To truly hear his voice, we must confront ourselves with the text of the Bible and the conviction in our hearts that the Word of Heaven is about to speak to us.

QUESTIONS

- How do you feel about the Bible?
- What is your approach to hearing God through the Bible?
- Based on this chapter, I have learned that ...

Chapter 7: The Gaze of the Soul

Quotations:

In the Scriptures there is practically no effort made to define faith. Outside of a brief fourteen-word

definition in Hebrews 11:1, I know of no Biblical definition, and even there 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 cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." This much is clear, and, to paraphrase Thomas à Kempis, "I had rather exercise faith than know the definition thereof."

Tozer quotes two passages:

They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. —Num 21:4-9

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. — John 3:14-15

"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... faith is the gaze of a soul upon a saving God.

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 man who has struggled to purify himself and has had nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when he stops tinkering with his soul and looks away to the perfect One. While he looks at Christ the very things he has so long been trying to do will be getting done within him. It will be God working in him to will and to do.

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.

So one hundred worshippers 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.

All the foregoing presupposes true repentance and a full committal of the life to God.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. — Hebrews 12:2

SUMMARY

- The Bible teaches us to have faith, but never fully defines what it is. Rather, the definition is

always by example of what faith does.

- The true nature of faith revealed by Jesus himself can be thought of as the gaze of a soul upon the Saving God.
- This focused gaze of the soul on God is the simplest act, the most refreshing act, and the most productive act we can do in our spiritual lives.

QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to “fix [y]our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2)?
- How does Tozer's understanding of faith inform your own?
- Based on this chapter, I learned that...

Chapter 8: Restoring the Creator-creature Relation

Quotations:

Much of our difficulty as seeking Christians stems from our unwillingness to take God as He is and adjust our lives accordingly.

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.

Let the seeking man reach a place where life and lips join to say continually “Be thou exalted,” and a thousand minor problems will be solved at once. His Christian life ceases to be the complicated thing it had been before and becomes the very essence of simplicity.

The man of God set his heart to exalt God above all; God accepted his intention as fact and acted accordingly. Not perfection, but holy intention made the difference.

In our desire after God let us keep always in mind that God also hath desire, and His desire is toward the sons of men, and more particularly toward those sons of men who will make the once-for-all decision to exalt Him over all.

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.

SUMMARY

- All of the problems of the earth stem from the broken relationship between the Creator and his creation. We have put ourselves in the place of exaltation and have suffered the results.
- The solution to these ills is to determine once and for all to exalt God, that he would be exalted in our lives.
- Our sincere intention to exalt God is enough for God to aid us in our journey, but this intention must be from the heart and not merely an intellectual assent.

QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to put God first in your life?
- What does it mean to exalt God in everything through your life?

- Is there some aspect of your life where you doubt God's supremacy?
- Based on this chapter, I have learned that...

Chapter 9: Meekness and Rest

Quotations:

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?

Jesus calls us to His rest, and meekness is His method. The meek man cares not at all who is greater than he, for he has long ago decided that the esteem of the world is not worth the effort...

...he will have attained a place of soul rest. As he walks on in meekness he will be happy to let God defend him. The old struggle to defend himself is over. He has found the peace which meekness brings.

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 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.

SUMMARY

- Tozer identifies the problems of Pride, Pretense, and Artificiality, as burdens carried by people.
- The solution to those burdens is the meekness of Christ—humbly releasing to God all need to be thought of in a particular way other than what we truly are.
- Our humility before God releases us from our burdens.

QUESTIONS

- How are pretense, pride, and artificiality a burden for people today?
- How is meekness the solution to that burden?
- What does meekness mean for your life?
- Because of this chapter, I learned that ...

Chapter 10: The Sacrament of Living

Some Quotations:

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.

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.

Let us think of a Christian believer in whose life the twin wonders of repentance and the new birth have been wrought. He is now living according to the will of God as he understands it from the written Word. Of such a one it may be said that every act of his life is or can be as truly sacred as prayer or baptism or the Lord's Supper.

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.

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.

It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular, it is why he does it. The motive is everything. Let a man sanctify the Lord God in his heart and he can thereafter do no common act. All he does is good and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For such a man, living itself will be sacramental and the whole world a sanctuary.

SUMMARY

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. — 1 Corinthians 10:31

- Because Christians live at once between two worlds (the earthly and the spiritual), we have fallen for the lie that there are also two kinds of living (sacred and secular).
- Because Jesus himself lived in an earthly human body, and because he was fully God, there is no human activity that can be considered inherently unspiritual.
- Our responsibility is to see every single act as a spiritual one, give it to God with a sincere heart and pure motives, and believe that he has received it in worship.
- We can find the presence of God in the midst of anything we do that is not sin.

QUESTIONS

- How has the sacred-secular heresy crept into your life?
- Is it easy or difficult for you to see every act as spiritual and every act as an act of worship?
- Based on this chapter, I learned that...