

A.W. TOZER

Compiled and Edited by James L. Snyder

THE CRUCIFIED LIFE



HOW TO LIVE OUT A DEEPER
CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE



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14 15 16 17 18 19 20 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

C O N T E N T S

Introduction: A Different Way of Living5

Part I: The Foundation of the Crucified Life

1. The Importance of the Crucified Life13
2. The Foundation of the Christian Experience23
3. The Resurrection Side of the Cross35
4. The Loneliness of the Crucified Life45

Part II: The Dynamics of the Crucified Life

5. The Case for Going On into the Promised Land61
6. A Discontent with the Status Quo75
7. Breaking the Static Condition and Going On89
8. The Great Obstacle to Living the Crucified Life101

Part III: The Perils of the Crucified Life

9. The Currency of the Crucified Life115
10. The Veils that Obscure God's Face127
11. The Strange Ingenuity of the Christian137
12. Allowing God to Be Himself145

Part IV: The Blessings of the Crucified Life

13. The Beauty of Contradictions157
14. The Refreshment of a Revival167
15. The Everlasting Rewards of Living the Crucified Life . .179
16. Spiritual Guides for the Journey189

Conclusion: The Purpose of the Refiner's Fire in the
Crucified Life199
Excerpts from *Inspired by Tozer*211

INTRODUCTION

A DIFFERENT WAY OF LIVING

Some dates are so pivotal that they change the whole course of history. Unfortunately, many of those dates lie comfortably in the shadows of obscurity. One such date in the life of A. W. Tozer has eluded me.

As the story is told, Tozer, a pastor at the time, was visiting one of his favorite bookstores in downtown Chicago. As he was perusing the shelves of used books that were so familiar to him, he ran across an old book that he had never seen before. He purchased the book and took it home, and his life was never the same.

The name of the book was *Spiritual Counsel*, and its author, François Fénelon, struck a warm cord in Tozer's own heart. Although Tozer allowed others to borrow many books in his personal library, he never allowed this one particular book to leave his possession to the day he died. He talked about the book so much that people began to inquire about it. As far as Tozer could determine, the book was out of print, and no other copies were available. One man was so interested in the book that, though Tozer did not allow him to take it out of his library, he did allow him to come and type out chapter after chapter. Such was the prominence that Tozer gave to this book. Much to Tozer's delight, the book was eventually republished in an updated and expanded edition titled *Christian Perfection*.

When you read Fénelon's book, you soon recognize a heart-beat that was also shared by Tozer. No two people were more alike in the spiritual realm. In fact, Fénelon's work so inspired Tozer that if you listen carefully to his sermons, you can hear the words of François Fénelon peek through on many occasions. Tozer, of course, was familiar with the works of other great writes—A. B. Simpson, John Wesley and Andrew Murray to name a few—but something about François Fénelon stirred the depths of his heart and his passion for God.

Fénelon's book introduced Tozer to a whole line of Christian "mystics"—a word not highly acceptable in evangelistic circles during Tozer's time (or even during our own)—and he went on to introduce these mystics to the evangelical church of his time. Tozer was not so much interested in literature as he was in pursuing God, and if an author could open up his heart to more of God, he was interested in that person. As you read this book, you will find many of these old saints of God that stirred Tozer's imagination popping in and out, enriching the message that was so important to him.

During his younger years, Tozer was primarily an evangelist. Although he was also a pastor of a local church, he spent much of his time going around the country preaching in conferences and at churches and camp meetings. His primary message at the time was evangelistic. However, after he encountered François Fénelon, his message began to change. When we come to Tozer in this book, we are coming to a man who is aflame with the message of the crucified life.

The Crucified Life and Spiritual Perfection

Now, what did Tozer mean by the "crucified life"? This entire book is an answer to that question, but here we can simply say that it is the life Christ ransomed on the cross, redeemed from

the judgment of sin, and made a worthy and acceptable sacrifice unto God. This represents a quality of life that is far above anything that is natural. It is altogether spiritual, which is a result of a dynamic inspiration from on high.

Another term that was not common among the evangelicals of Tozer's day was "spiritual perfection." This term came from François Fénelon, and it embodied the passion of Tozer's heart. Tozer was quick to point out that he wanted nothing whatsoever to do with anything that did not have biblical authority—and he also threw out anything that was extra-biblical. However, spiritual perfection was a term that Tozer found to be biblical, as Paul writes in Philippians 3:12: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." This should be the great passion of the Christian's heart—to press forward unto what the apostle Paul called "perfection."

There were many things about the crucified life that interested Tozer. It was a life that was absolutely and irreconcilably incompatible with the world. It breathed the rarefied air of heaven while walking on earth. To the believer, it meant the absolute death of ego and the resurgence of Christ in his or her life. Emphatically, Tozer taught that Christ did not die on the cross just to save people from hell; rather, He died on the cross so that all could become one with Christ. That concept was so personally important to Tozer that anything that came between him and that unity with Christ had to be courageously dealt with and done away with, regardless of the cost.

The message of the crucified life was not a new concept. Tozer himself noted that all of the great Christians of the past wrote about this idea in some fashion. It was the unifying factor among a wide diversity of Christians down through the

ages. The legacy of the church fathers, of the reformers, the revivalists, the Christian mystics and the hymnists all resonated on this one message. And while they might disagree on many points, in this one area there was a unique unity among them. The emphasis of the crucified life was to press forward—regardless of the difficulties and in spite of the cost—to the state of spiritual perfection.

A Difficult Message

Tozer often confessed he would have preferred to simply talk about God all the time—about how wonderful God is and how wonderful it is to be on our way to heaven, enjoying the blessings of the Lord day by day. He would have preferred to preach such positive sermons. But the Spirit stirred him to keep pressing the deep things of God. There was more to the Christian life than just being saved from the past and from one's sins. There was more to the Christian life than having a happy time on one's way to heaven.

Tozer saw the evangelical and fundamentalist churches of his day selling out to the world, just as the liberal churches did before them, and it disturbed him greatly. It bothered him to see these churches compromising with worldly values and slipping into the murky error of liberalism. It goaded him that the gospel churches were adopting worldly measures to build up church attendance, and he saw that many church leaders were using these things to promote themselves.

It was an era of what many called “easy believism.” Simply put, the idea was that if you said you believed in Jesus, everything else would be all right. You did not have to change anything, for God loved you just the way you were. This kind of message stirred Dr. Tozer greatly. And Tozer was at his best when he was stirred.

It was for this reason that during the last years of his life, Tozer preached and wrote about the importance of living the crucified life. He felt an inward spiritual urging to sound the clarion call for the Church to return to the roots of the Christian message—the message of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Several times he said, “God did not call me to be a back scratcher,” and anyone who heard him preach or read any of his editorials knew that was quite true. He was not interested in making people feel good about themselves; in fact, his agenda was quite the opposite. To Tozer, there was nothing good in man or even in the Christian—the only good was in Christ.

Tozer’s goal was not to make attacks against a person, but he always sought to speak the truth as he saw it in love. As you might imagine, this did not always make him friends. One time, he told Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones of London that he had preached himself off every Bible conference in America. Of course, that was a bit exaggerated, because he was in demand at Bible conferences all across the country up until the time of his death. But some places did not invite him back. Regardless, he was tough and uncompromising on this issue because of what he felt was the seriousness of the condition of the evangelical church. He did not feel called of God to smooth ruffled feathers; rather, his calling was to ruffle some of those feathers.

Reverend Ray McAfee, a longtime associate pastor with Dr. A. W. Tozer, once told me the following story: Tozer was attending a holiness convention that was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. He was the keynote speaker, and there were a number of preliminaries before he came to the pulpit. People were going around cutting other people’s ties in half, there was impromptu singing along the lines of what we would call karaoke, and everybody was having a good old time celebrating the anniversary. McAfee could see Tozer tapping his right foot. The

longer he sat there, the more he tapped his right foot. McAfee knew that Tozer was getting stirred.

When Tozer walked up to the pulpit, his first words were, “What’s happened to you holiness people?” Then Tozer took them to the spiritual woodshed as they had never been taken before. Nothing was more serious to Tozer than the things of God. He had a sense of humor, but he did not consider the gathering of God’s people to be a frivolous occasion but rather a time for worship and adoration of God. To Tozer, if you needed entertainment to get a crowd, it was not Christian.

The Challenge of the Crucified Life

This book is strong medicine for what Tozer considered a serious spiritual malady. The more serious the condition, the more radical the remedy; and for this reason, Tozer was willing to uncompromisingly confront people with the message of the crucified life.

It must be said that this message did not come without cost for Tozer. His friends and family often misunderstood him. He once wrote an editorial titled “The Saint Walks Alone,” which he wrote from experience. It is easy to go along with the crowd, but the one who is committed to living the crucified life will always lean hard into the wind of opposition and misunderstanding.

Thus, living the crucified life is not an easy proposition—in fact, it will be the most challenging thing you will ever face. The cost is certainly high. The pathway is rough. The way forward is often lonely. But the rewards you will gain of knowing God in intimate fellowship will be well worth the journey.

Rev. James L. Snyder

PART I

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THE
FOUNDATION
OF THE
CRUCIFIED
LIFE

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CRUCIFIED LIFE

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

ROMANS 6:6

Nothing weighs heavier on my heart than the subject of this study. If it were not such a crucial Bible teaching, one could ignore the controversies and go on to something else. However, such is not the case. The subject of the crucified life is vitally important to the health and growth of the Church.

The Church is not some impersonal abstract floating around in space. Rather, the Church is comprised of individuals who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The health of the Church is in direct proportion to the health of each individual Christian. If the Church is to grow and be healthy, the individual Christians comprising the Church must grow spiritually. Only a dynamically healthy Church can ever hope to fulfill the commission of Christ to “go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15).

One important thing needs to be understood. Not all Christians are alike. Jesus said in Matthew 13:23:

But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which

also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Too many of us are satisfied to be thirtyfold Christians. But the desire of our Lord is that we press on to become hundredfold Christians. The question then is, how are we to go on to this stage?

This is the focus of this book. I think it my duty to prod the thirtyfold and the sixtyfold Christians to press on to the ultimate Christian experience, being a hundredfold Christian. The path that accomplishes this is living the crucified life. I do not think it would be amiss to say that most Christian literature today is focused on the thirtyfold Christians. Some might venture out and address the sixtyfold Christians, but it is safe to say there are few who focus on hundredfold Christians. This book is dedicated to that very thing. I simply call it *The Crucified Life*.

With that being the case, it is incumbent upon me to define some elements I will use throughout this study. If I use one term and the reader understands it in a different way from the manner in which I am using it, then communication breaks down. So let me define some of the basic concepts that will be developed throughout this study.

The Crucified Life

I first need to establish what I mean when I use the phrase “the crucified life.” A variety of phrases have been used since apostolic days to define the subject—phrases such as “the deeper life,” “the higher life,” “the wholly sanctified life,” “the spirit-filled life,” “the victorious Christian life,” “the exchanged life.” But after looking at some of the literature produced on this topic, none seems to be any deeper, higher, holier or more Spirit-

filled than common run-of-the-mill Christianity. For some, the phrase seems to be merely a catchphrase.

Strange Inconsistency

What I mean by “the crucified life” is a life wholly given over to the Lord in absolute humility and obedience: a sacrifice pleasing to the Lord. The word “crucified” takes us back to what Christ did on the cross. The key verse for this is Galatians 2:20:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

From the natural standpoint, the crucified life is burdened with contradictions. The biggest contradiction, of course, is the phrase itself: “crucified life.” If a life is truly crucified, it is dead and not alive. But how can a person be dead and alive at the same time? Being dead and yet alive is one of the strange inconsistencies of the life established for us by Jesus’ dying on the cross. But oh, the blessedness of these seeming inconsistencies.

Scriptural Proof

This study does not advocate any kind of Christian experience not based squarely on the plain teachings of the Scripture. Everything taught in this study must square with the entire Word of God. Anybody can prove anything by piecing together isolated texts. What is the teaching of the entire Word of God? That is the question that must be considered. Too much of contemporary Christianity is borrowed from the philosophies of the world and even other religions—phrases and mottos that on the surface look great but are not rooted in Scripture or that mostly bolster one’s self-image.

Whatever the teaching might be or whoever the teacher might be, we must strongly demand scriptural proof. If such proof cannot be presented, then the teaching must be rejected out of mind and out of hand. This may sound legalistic, but it is one of the absolutes that is part of the Christian experience. The Christian lives and dies by the Book.

I am not advocating in this study anything that cannot be proved by Scripture, and I do not mean just a verse here and there, but by the whole counsel of God. We believe in the whole Bible, not bits and pieces. The whole Bible supports the idea of progressing toward spiritual perfection in our Christian lives. Spiritual perfection is what the apostle Paul longed for and spoke about:

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12).

The crucified life is a life absolutely committed to following after Christ Jesus. To be more like Him. To think like Him. To act like Him. To love like Him. The whole essence of spiritual perfection has everything to do with Jesus Christ. Not with rules and regulations. Not with how we dress or what we do or do not do. We are not to look like each other; rather, we are to look like Christ. We can get all caught up in the nuances of religion and miss the glorious joy of following after Christ. Whatever hinders us in our journey must be dealt a deathblow.

The Christian Mystics

Throughout this study will be quotes from some of the great Christian mystics going back to the days of the apostles. It is

important to define what I mean by “mystic.” This term has been much abused in the house of its friends. Perhaps it would be good to use another term for this, but every time something is renamed, it loses some of its original meaning. Therefore, without any regret or hesitation, I will stick with this old term.

I have found throughout my study that these old saints of God, the mystics, really knew God. “Mystic,” then, refers to someone who has an intimate, a direct, relationship with God. In my pursuit of God, I want to know what they knew of God and how they came to know Him on such intimate grounds. (This is not to say I agree with everything they wrote, as I would not agree with everything anybody else would write.)

Back on the farm in Pennsylvania, we had an old apple tree. It was a gnarly, stark-looking tree. A casual glance at this tree might tempt a person to pass it up. Regardless of how terrible the tree looked, however, it produced some of the most delicious apples I have ever eaten. I endured the gnarly branches in order to enjoy the delicious fruit.

I feel the same way about some of these grand old mystics of the Church. They may look gnarly and austere, but they produced wonderful spiritual fruit. The fruit is what really matters, not the appearance. It matters not if the man wears a robe or a suit; it is the man that really counts. I am willing to overlook a lot if the writer genuinely knows God and “knows God other than by hearsay,” as Thomas Carlyle used to say. Too many only repeat what they have heard from somebody who heard it from somebody else. It is refreshing to hear an original voice. Each of these mystics had that original voice.

The Church has always had this group of people—both men and women—who had such a hunger for God and a passion to know Him that everything else took second place. Many of them were harassed and tormented by the established Church.

Some even were martyred because of this uncontrollable passion for God. Many of them lived prior to the Reformation and had no idea what a protestant or even an evangelical was. For the most part, they were not interested in labels. They were only interested in pursuing God.

These men and women were not protestant, Catholic, fundamentalist or evangelical; they were simply Christians in hot pursuit of God. They had no banner to wave except Jehovah-Nissi. They had no honor to preserve apart from Jesus Christ. They gave witness to a life ablaze with love and adoration for God that nothing can extinguish. Not all the years since their death have been able to quench the fervor of their love for God.

Fortunately, for us, some of the great devotional literature of the Church that these men and women gave their lives to write has been preserved. In reading these great works, one is transported out of time and into the mystical wonder of pursuing God. It is as if time has no bearing between the author and the reader. It is hard to read such material for long without feeling the heartbeat of the author's passion. This, in my opinion, is what is missing among Christians today, especially in the evangelical church.

Pick up any hymnal, particularly an old one, and you will find many hymns by these great Christian mystics. Their pursuit of God is only matched by their desire to share the object of their love with any and all who will listen. Perhaps one of their quotes throughout this study will light a fire in your heart.

The *King James Version* Bible

To avoid confusion, I need to mention why I use the *King James Version* throughout this study. Although I have every Bible translation imaginable, I still place the *King James Version* at the top of the list of my Bibles to read. I certainly am not against other

translations. In fact, I am usually the first one to buy the newest translation, but I give predominance to this version in my reading and study.

I know all the arguments against the *King James Version*, but answer me this: If it is as bad as some scholars tell us, why has God blessed it so much? More people have come into the kingdom of God through this blessed translation than any other. It has been translated into more languages than any other version; perhaps more than all the rest put together.

Does it not seem strange that the generation with the most advanced technology and the easiest-to-read Bible translations is the weakest generation of Christians in the history of our country? Church attendance has never been lower, and the Christian influence in our culture never weaker.

For so long we have heard the complaint that people do not read and study the Bible because the language is antiquated. Yet the generation who had only the *King James Version* was the generation that sparked revivals and missionary movements around the world. It just may be that the Bible translation was not the problem. It is my observation that the natural man does not understand spiritual principles. The problem has never been the translation. The problem has never been academic. The problem has always been spiritual.

One important point many fail to understand is that the Bible was never meant to replace God; rather, it was meant to lead us into the heart of God. Too many Christians stop with the text and never go on to experience the presence of God.

The “old” *King James Version* has been so mightily used of God that it deserves a place of honor in our reading and study. Even the most casual reflection on the past will reveal that the Spirit of God has used it to move upon men, opening up their hearts and minds to understand the Scriptures. It has always

been “the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:16).

I would recommend that you go to some secondhand bookstore and buy a used *King James* Bible. You might have to put down a few dollars, but it will be the best investment you have ever made. I know the “thees” and “thous” are rather cumbersome, but one of the most beautiful things about these words is that they slow you down when you read. Probably there is no greater offense in all of Christendom than speed-reading the Bible. The Bible must be read slowly and meditatively, allowing the Spirit of God to open up our understanding.

The Christian Hymnal

The last thing I want to define is “the Christian hymnal.” My heart aches as I see this increasingly being neglected by congregations. The Christian hymnal is one of the great depositories of the Christian life and experience. The men and women behind these hymns were writing out of deep spiritual experiences. The poetry of some hymns may not be perfect. In fact, some may be very difficult to sing. Pushing the hymnal aside, however, is to forfeit one of the great spiritual treasures of the Christian Church. The hymnal connects us with our Christian heritage, a legacy that should not be denied to this generation of Christians. If we are going to press on to be hundredfold Christians, on to Christian perfection and the crucified life, we need this vital connection to the historic Church.

Show me the condition of your Bible and your hymnal and I will accurately predict the condition of your soul. Our souls need to be nurtured and cultivated, and nothing does that better than the Christian hymnal. I cannot imagine a Christian not spending quality time in the hymnal. Hardly a morning passes when I don’t kneel down with an open Bible

and a hymnal and sing comfortably off-key the great hymns of the Church.

I often counsel young Christians, after they have their Bible and their Bible reading established, to get a hymnal. If a young Christian would spend one year reading through and meditating on the hymns of Isaac Watts alone, he would have a better theological education than four years in Bible college and four years in seminary. Isaac Watts and others like him were able to put theology into their hymns. These hymn writers—both men and women—set their generation singing theology. And the theology of the heart bursts forth in melodious adoration and praise.

Pursuing the Crucified Life

Living the crucified life is a journey not for the faint at heart. The journey is rough and filled with dangers and difficulties, and it does not end until we see Christ. Yet though the journey may be difficult, the result of seeing Christ face to face is worth it all.

Face to Face

Carrie E. Breck (1855–1934)

Face to face with Christ my Savior,
Face to face—what will it be,
When with rapture I behold Him,
Jesus Christ, who died for me?

Face to face I shall behold Him,
Far beyond the starry sky;
Face to face in all His glory,
I shall see Him by and by!

Only faintly now I see Him,
With the darkened veil between;
But a blessed day is coming,
When His glory shall be seen.

What rejoicing in His presence,
When are banished grief and pain;
When the crooked ways are straightened,
And the dark things shall be plain!

Face to face! O blissful moment!
Face to face to see and know;
Face to face with my Redeemer,
Jesus Christ, who loves me so.