

*The Pursuit
of God*

A. W.

TOZER

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of God*

MOODY PUBLISHERS

CHICAGO

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MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE
OF CHICAGO

LOC Control Number: 2006922908

Previously published by Christian Publications, Inc.
First Christian Publications Edition 1948
First WingSpread Publishers Edition 2006
First Moody Publishers Edition 2015

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Interior design: Erik M. Peterson

Cover design: Faceout Studio

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Trade paper edition ISBN: 978-1-60066-003-0

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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America

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FOREWORD

T*he Pursuit of God* was the fruit of A. W. Tozer's spiritual exploration into the essence of God's nature. What resulted from the efforts of this obscure pastor from the South side of Chicago has left a profound mark on the evangelical church. The 1948 publication of this book thrust Tozer into a respected position of spiritual leadership that he maintained for the remainder of his life. Tozer's ministry became a spiritual oasis for those of the "fellowship of the burning heart," to use a phrase he delighted in.

I was fifteen when I first discovered *The Pursuit of God*. I have read it twenty times or more. Each time I read it my soul is ministered to in a fresh way. The discovery of *The Pursuit of God* also started me on a journey into the life of this intriguing man.

Tozer's walk with God was a priority with him and he allowed nothing to interfere. It was the basis of his attraction to the Christian mystics. Their absorption in the daily practice of the presence of God was a stimulus for him and he delighted in their spiritual fellowship. He could forgive anyone almost anything if he discovered they had pure intent toward God.

Dr. Tozer's prayer life was quite remarkable. His regular habit was to sprawl on his study floor, facedown, and worship God. Often, according to his own testimony, he would lie in silent, wordless worship of God, usually oblivious to his surroundings. Such prayer and worship marked the foundation of his study and preparation for public ministry.

The desire to worship God and to inspire others to a deeper awareness of God are clearly evident in *The Pursuit of God*. For the person thirsting for the things of God without distracting embellishments, this book will become a faithful companion. There are some books that can be enjoyed with one reading, others are enhanced by many readings. *The Pursuit of God* is one of the latter.

REV. JAMES L. SNYDER
March 1993

TOZER'S LEGACY

Quietness of soul, the fruit of truly seeking God, is seldom found in twentieth-century Christians. Far too many have come to accept turbulence of soul as the norm and have ceased to seek God with their whole hearts. Some have fled the cities to cloistered retreats in the hope of finding this quietness, only to discover their hearts still restless. One unusual American minister who found for his own soul the secret of quietness and articulated his discovery to the Christian community was A. W. Tozer. He came upon this closer walk with God in the bustle and noise of the city of Chicago. Tozer never enjoyed the luxury of a cloistered life. Born in a poor home in the hills of western Pennsylvania, he had known hardship from as long as he could remember. Forced by his home situation to forfeit an education, Tozer entered the ministry without either high school or college training.

A. W. Tozer came to Christ at the age of seventeen, after hearing a lay preacher speaking at a street meeting in Akron, Ohio. He joined the Methodist church and became an active witness for Christ. A dingy corner of the basement of the family home became his private prayer chamber. There, at the very beginning of his Christian

life, Tozer established what was to be a lifelong practice of waiting on God.

Having become a lay preacher, Tozer found himself in disfavor with his church and decided to join with The Christian and Missionary Alliance where he found opportunity to use his gifts. His preaching ability soon made a place for him. In 1919 the district superintendent assigned Tozer to pastor the Alliance church in Nutter Fort, West Virginia. After subsequent pastorates in Toledo and Indianapolis, he accepted a call in 1928 to Southside Alliance Church in Chicago, Illinois. His ministry in that congregation continued for thirty-one years. Avenue Road Alliance Church in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, was the last pastorate he served.

For many of the years he pastored the Chicago congregation, Tozer also preached on the Moody Bible Institute radio station WMBI. Thousands of lay people and pastors listened regularly to his rich exposition of Bible truth given on "Talks from a Pastor's Study."

His literary skills were soon recognized by his own denomination and eventually by the whole evangelical church community. In 1950 the General Council of The Christian and Missionary Alliance elected him editor of *The Alliance Witness* (now *Alliance Life*), a position he held until his death.

Aiden W. Tozer educated himself by years of diligent study and a constant prayerful seeking of the mind of God. With Tozer, seeking truth and seeking God were

one and the same thing. For example, when he felt he needed an understanding of the great English works of Shakespeare, he read them through on his knees, asking God to help him understand their meaning. This procedure was typical of his method of self-education.

With no teacher but the Holy Spirit and good books, A. W. Tozer became a theologian, a scholar and a master craftsman in the use of the English language. There are not many quotes in his writings, for he had so assimilated all he had read that he could freely write in simple but attractive language the principles of truth he had discovered across these years of anointed study. The evangelical mystics were his favorite study. The longings of his own heart were satisfied by what he learned from the men and women who kept the light of spiritual reality burning in a time when apostasy and spiritual darkness seemed almost universal.

Much of the strong meat in *The Pursuit of God* came out of the crucible of Tozer's own personal experience. The chapter titled "The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing" reflected his desperate struggle to turn his only daughter over to God. The battle for him was intense and devastating, but when full surrender came, a new and glorious release became his. He had learned to know God in the school of practical experience.

Since the first edition of *The Pursuit of God* was published in 1948, millions of copies have been printed and distributed in several languages around the world. While

all of Tozer's writings are well received, *The Pursuit of God* continues to be the most popular.

The writing of this book was for A. W. Tozer a deep spiritual experience. Dr. David J. Fant Jr., one of his biographers, describes the process:

Tozer literally wrote *The Pursuit of God* on his knees. Perhaps that explains its power and the blessing that has rested on it.

Perhaps the continued usefulness of this book can be attributed to the writer's great spiritual discovery that to seek God does not narrow one's life, but brings it, rather, to the level of highest possible fulfillment.

A. W. Tozer was something of a twentieth-century prophet calling the modern church back to the practice of godliness and to that level of spiritual reality enjoyed by serious seekers after God from the days of the apostles. In the legacy of his writings, none speaks more clearly to our deepest heart need than *The Pursuit of God*.

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 that 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 that should accompany faith in Christ, that wonder that 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.” 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. Though right tempers 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.

Preface

Thanks to our splendid Bible societies and to other effective agencies for 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 that it is a discovery which my own heart has

A. W. TOZER

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.

A. W. TOZER
Chicago, Illinois
June 16, 1948

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 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 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. 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 Psalm 42:1–2: “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?” 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 a 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 is 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 unem-

barrassed 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: 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. It is conscious: 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.

*Shoreless Ocean, who can sound Thee?
Thine own eternity is round Thee, Majesty divine!*

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 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.*

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" (33:18). 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" (3:8).

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," 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 God

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

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.” Yet underneath all his thinking lay 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 called thee, to thy degree.” 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 even 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.”

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,” 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 so 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." Then give me grace to rise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long.

In Jesus' name

Amen.