

CHAPTER 14

THE GAZE OF THE SOUL

A.W. Tozer knew God more deeply and saw God more clearly than just about any person I am aware of. If you read *The Pursuit of God*, you will be immediately struck by the evidence that this was a man who pursued God with everything he had, and yet was always thirsty for more. He treasured knowing and experiencing God above all things. Tozer certainly had his flaws,¹ but no one can deny that his heart burned and yearned for God more intensely than most.

I swiped the title of this chapter from his own chapter seven in *The Pursuit of God*. Tozer depicts a man who reads through the Bible for the very first time, with no prior knowledge at all, and comes to understand that this thing called ‘faith’ must be absolutely essential to the Christian life. But what is it? How would you go about defining it? The closest thing to a definition of faith in the Bible is Hebrews 11:1, but even there, it is describing what faith is in action, not what it is *in essence*.

1. Lyle Dorsett, in his excellent biography, *A Passion for God: The Spiritual Journey of A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), chronicles Tozer's consistent neglect of his wife and children, for example.

Looking and Believing

Tozer refers back to Moses' bronze serpent in Numbers 21. The people grumbled and complained against God, and said they wanted to go back to Egypt. So, God sent deadly serpents among their camp and they began biting the people. The Israelites were frightened, and many were dying. Moses pleaded with the Lord on their behalf, and God gave Moses a way for the people to be saved. He told Moses to fashion a serpent made of bronze, to set it up on a pole in a high, visible place, and everyone who looked upon the serpent would live.

Thousands of years later, Jesus would reveal to Nicodemus that this serpent was an Old Testament foreshadowing of His own death on the cross. 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life' (John 3:14-15).

So, Tozer writes,

Our plain man in reading this would make an important discovery. He would notice that "look" and "believe" were synonymous terms. "Looking" on the Old Testament serpent is identical with "believing" on the New Testament Christ. That is, the looking and the believing are the same thing. And he would understand that while Israel looked with their external eyes, believing is done with the heart. I think he would conclude that faith is the gaze of a soul upon a saving God.²

That last sentence is the ultimate point Tozer is driving at in his chapter, and also the point I am driving at in mine here. Seeing God with the eyes of our hearts is the very essence of faith. We must look to God by looking to Jesus (Heb. 12:2) for the initial grace of salvation, and we must continue to look to Him for the sustained grace of perseverance. In other words, gazing at God through Christ is what saves us, and it is also what keeps us saved.

Tozer again writes, 'From all this we learn that faith is not a once-done act, but a continuous gaze of the heart at the Triune God. Believing, then, is directing the heart's attention to Jesus. It is lifting the mind to "behold the Lamb of God," and never ceasing that beholding for the rest of our lives.'³

2. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 82.

3. *Ibid.*, 83.

This is especially helpful when we encounter those who ‘believe’ that Jesus existed, died on the cross, and rose from the dead, and are therefore convinced they are saved. Saving faith is about more than assent to the facts of history. Even Satan and his demons accept these facts about Christ, but this does not save them (Jas. 2:19). When Jesus says in John 3:16 that ‘whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life,’ He means this gaze of the soul.

The Impossible Made Easy

The Bible is always telling us to do what cannot be done. Jesus tells us to ‘Be perfect’ (Matt. 5:48). Paul tells us to know what surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:19). You must be born again (John 3:3). And, in this book, we have examined how we must see this God whom no one has ever seen, nor can see, and if you were to see Him you would die. It is no wonder some throw their hands up in frustration and say, ‘I will never live up to His standards! Maybe some other people are strong enough, smart enough, and have enough will-power, but normal folks like me are left on the outside looking in.’

But the beauty of knowing God is that, while we will never plumb the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God (Rom. 11:33), God has made faith and salvation simple enough that anyone can do it. In fact, it’s so simple, the smartest and most self-disciplined will often have a more difficult time of it.

Here is Tozer again:

Now, if faith is the gaze of the heart at God, and if this gaze is but the raising of the inward eyes to meet the all-seeing eyes of God, then it follows that it is one of the easiest things possible to do. It would be like God to make the most vital thing easy and place it within the range of possibility for the weakest and poorest of us.⁴

The more I come to know God, the more I find myself saying those words, ‘*It would be just like God to do that,*’ in my everyday conversations. As we grow deeper and more intimate in our relationship with Him, we come to know His heart, His values, and even, I think, His tendencies. Therefore, our discernment grows as well. As you mature in Christ, you will find that some things you hear simply don’t smell right spiritually. Your spiritual senses will

4. Ibid., 86.

throw up red flags. But at other times, as someone is sharing with you about their life, you will find yourself thinking or saying, *‘That sounds just like something God would do.’*

God has made the most vital thing—faith—easy and placed it on the lowest shelf, easily accessible to any who would reach for it. To flesh this out, Tozer highlights three ways that faith is not restricted to the spiritual elite, but is easily accessible to all. First, you don’t need special equipment or skills. Those who are weak and poor can take encouragement from the fact that while certain people may have a built-in advantage over them in finances, power, intellect, or worldly opportunity, there is no such thing when it comes to faith. ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit... blessed are the meek... blessed are those who are persecuted.’

When it comes to seeing God, the chairman of the elders has no inherent advantage over the teenage girl in the pews. The preacher has no inherent advantage over the nursery volunteer. And the wealthy man seen as a pillar in his community has no inherent advantage over the single mom living paycheck to paycheck.

Second, Tozer notes that this seeing/believing/looking can be done at any time. We do not have to wait for special days of the Christian calendar to gaze upon the beauty and glory of God. We are no closer to God on Easter Sunday than we are on Saturday, August 3 or Monday, October 4.⁵ You have just as much access at this moment as you do on Sunday during the worship service.

Third, and finally, just as time does not matter, neither does place. Since seeing God happens in our inner being, with the eyes of our hearts, you can do it from anywhere. I may never be able to make a trip to the Holy Land, and walk where Jesus walked. But it makes no difference. I can know and see God just as well right here in Columbia, KY. You don’t need to drive to the church building to pray fervently and seek the Lord. Get on your knees right there in your living room or bedroom. As Christ said to the Samaritan woman, a time is now here when we are not required to be in this temple or on that mountain to worship the Father. True worshipers can worship anywhere, in spirit and in truth. Brother Lawrence, in that wonderful book *The Practice of the Presence of God*, noted how he

5. Ibid., 86.

could experience the deep and overflowing presence of God while cooking eggs or gathering straw or any other daily duty.⁶

So, we find that this impossible task of seeing the unseen God is mysterious and unnatural, and yet it is extraordinarily simple and accessible at the same time. With God, the impossible becomes easy.

Developing and Training Our Inner Eyes

While it may be accessible and simple, this inner seeing does not come naturally to us. Therefore, we must grow into it. Like a seldom used muscle that is all of a sudden much needed because of a new job or a new activity, we must develop and train the eyes of our hearts to see or perceive God more regularly. The goal is not a glimpse here and a glimpse there, but a consistent awareness of His goodness, His glory, and His presence. The abiding joy that comes from this kind of lifestyle is absolutely priceless.

For most of us, our inner gaze is on the world and the things in the world by default. Through discipline and focus we can wrench it away from the world and onto God for a short time, but then, like a screen door on a spring, it snaps back to its default position. However, it is possible, over time, to train the eyes of our hearts to do the exact opposite. If we walk with the Lord, and gaze at His glory enough, slowly, probably imperceptibly, over the course of years and years, our default will change. Instead of having to wrench our inner eyes away from the world for a moment before they snap back, the world will actually become the momentary distraction. They will snap back to God.

This may sound impossible to those of us who have only walked with Christ for a small portion of our lives, but there are plenty of believers who experience this. Some never even take a step back to recognize it, which is probably just as well. The truly humble do not waste time analyzing their own virtues. Tozer writes, ‘Many have found the secret of which I speak and, without 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.’⁷

Perhaps this is what Christ means when He says ‘abide in me.’ The consistent inner sight of God, of His goodness and His glory,

6. Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Kindle loc. 434.

7. Tozer, *Pursuit*, 87.

SEEING THE UNSEEN GOD

produces a settled and steady joy that the cares of this world cannot touch. Just the other day I was talking to a man who seems to live this way and he told me that while the chaos in the world seems to grow by the day, he has an inner peace that just does not leave. He could hardly explain it. Then he said, 'I guess that's why Paul calls it the peace that passes understanding.' Yes and amen.

CHAPTER 15

YOU MUST WORK HARD TO SEE GOD

There was once a very wise and respected professor who was approached by a student curious about scientific observation. 'Very well,' said the professor, taking out a huge jar. 'Take this fish and look at it. Eventually I'll test you.' The student sat down and started looking at the fish. After about ten minutes he thought he saw everything there was to be seen. He looked for the professor but he was nowhere to be found. So, the student kept looking at the fish. Thirty minutes passed. An hour. Two hours.

Finally, the professor returned. 'What have you observed?' The student rehearsed it all. The fleshy lips, the lidless eyes, the shimmering scales, the lateral line, the spinous fin, the forked tail. The professor seemed disappointed. 'You haven't looked very carefully. You haven't even seen some of the most obvious features. Keep looking.'

The student wanted nothing more to do with the fish. He was miserable. But he wanted to please the professor. So, he kept looking. Slowly he discovered one new feature after another. Soon time began to fly by as the student observed that fish. He discovered all kinds of things he'd never noticed before. He realized just how right the professor had

been. After an hour the professor returned to a new list. 'That's good. But that's not all. Go on. Keep looking.'

And so, for three long days he put that fish before the student's eyes, forbidding him to study anything else, repeating the same chorus each time. 'Look... look... look.'¹

Just like the student who had to look, and look, and keep looking (and keep focusing!) on that fish, seeing God does not simply happen to us. We must give it time, attention, and effort. We must pursue it with everything we have. 'You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart' (Jer. 29:13).

Seeing God is an undeserved gift of His grace, but that does not mean effort plays no part in it. This takes hard work. Grace-infused, Spirit-powered work. But don't despair! For those who desire God above all else, the work is not burdensome. In fact, most of the time it will not feel like work. Yet it is work all the same.

Two Biblical Examples

Consider two men who had to work hard to see Jesus. The first is Zacchaeus (see Luke 19:1-10), who had two large obstacles, or disadvantages, to overcome in his quest to catch a glimpse of Christ. First, he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He hired himself out to the Romans to collect their exorbitant taxes from the Jews. His wealth and comfort were a direct result of the suffering of his own people. He would have been considered a traitor. Think of a Jewish person during World War 2, passing information along to the Nazis about where his fellow Jews were hiding out. This meant Zacchaeus wasn't getting any help from the people.

Not only that, he was also a considerably short man. So, on the day he was trying to see Jesus in a crowd full of others who wanted to do the same, he was out of luck. He couldn't see over anyone, and no one was about to give up their spot for a traitor. The only way to see Jesus on that day was to scamper up a tree, like a little kid. Now, I don't know about you, but for me the prospect of climbing a tree as an adult is much, much different than doing it as a kid. I would have to be desperate to attempt something like that now

1. Desiring God, 'Keep Looking: The Life Changing Secret to Reading the Bible,' YouTube Video, 2:56, April 25, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEP3s53VD4c>.

(and I'm only thirty-six!). Not only that, but in the midst of a crowd, a grown man like me in a tree would attract all kinds of weird looks and probably a few words of ridicule.

This tells us something of Zacchaeus' strong desire to see Jesus. He was willing to do whatever it took. He did not give up after no one would let him through to see. He did not allow the prospect of ridicule to stop him from climbing a tree like a child. Have we not experienced this same principle in our own lives? If we want something bad enough, we will make sacrifices and overcome obstacles to get it. We will find a way because we must.

Next, consider the paralyzed man in Mark 2. The crowd that had gathered at this house was so large, there was simply no more room to get anyone close to Jesus, especially not a paralyzed man who had to be carried on a mat. But like Zacchaeus, those obstacles were not enough to stop this man and his loyal friends. Their desire for Jesus was too great. So, they carried him up on the roof and proceeded to rip a hole in it, even though it was not their house! Yet, because of their relentless pursuit of Jesus, the paralyzed man walked home that day, carrying his own mat.

This quest to see God will not be easy. It will not come to those who passively wait. It will take work, and risk, and even the willingness to be scorned by others. But the reward is worth all of it, and more. If we seek Him with all our heart, He will make sure we find Him, and when you find God—when you see Him—it never disappoints.

The Means of Our Pursuit

Our quest to see the Lord will likely not involve pushing through a crowd, or climbing a tree, or a roof. It's a pursuit to see what cannot be seen. It is much the same principle as when Paul tells us that the battle we are fighting cannot be fought against flesh and blood, with worldly weapons (see Ephesians 6:10-18). We are pursuing a spiritual sight with the eyes of our hearts. This sight comes through means such as the hard work of consistent Bible study.

Are you willing to study your Bible to see the glory of God? If not, you will never see more than a dim, fleeting glance. As we saw in chapter six, the primary way God shows us His glory is through His Word. The harder we work to study and understand it, the more of His glory we will see. Are you willing to put in the work?

Are you willing to study it regularly? To carve out time in your daily schedule for it, sometimes sacrificing things you enjoy such as television, sleep, or productivity? Are you willing to do it when your mind is most alert? To devote your best hours to the pursuit of seeing God? Are you willing to invest money into this pursuit? For tools that will help you study the Bible better? What could be a better use of your financial resources? Are you willing to study *all of Scripture*, and not just the easier parts, or the parts you enjoy most? Otherwise you may get a partial view of God, one that is not accurate or well-rounded.

Another means of pursuing the sight of God is fasting. John Piper's excellent book on fasting is fittingly titled *A Hunger for God*. Fasting is a way of saying to God, *I need you more than I need food*. Or we might say, *I need to see you and be satisfied in you more than I need to eat and be satisfied in food*. As Job said, 'I have cherished the words of his mouth more than my portion of food' (Job 23:12). In His wisdom and providence, God has given us the gift of fasting for various purposes. We may fast to intensely petition God on a certain prayer request. We may fast to seek discernment of the Lord's will in an important decision. In the Bible there are some who fasted as an expression of sadness and lament before the Lord.

But one of the most important purposes for fasting is increased intimacy with God. For whatever reason, God has ordained that going without food for certain periods of time heightens our spiritual senses and connects us to Him in a way we do not experience in the normal course of everyday life. I can attest to this from my own experience. While the lack of food will increase your feelings of weakness, it will also increase your sense of the Lord's presence. Perhaps the heightened awareness of weakness is the whole point, just as Paul learned to depend on God's strength through weakness (see 2 Cor. 12:7-10). Through fasting, God opens the eyes of our hearts just a bit more. Fasting clears away a fog that blurs our spiritual vision.

In fact, all the spiritual disciplines are means by which we pursue a greater sight of God and His glory. Through disciplines such as Bible reading, fasting, Scripture memory and meditation, confession, stewardship, evangelism, worship, silence and solitude, and others, we are training the eyes of our hearts to see God as an athlete trains his body. We must never think of them as a means of manipulating God, or forcing Him to show Himself, but rather

through them we place ourselves nearer to Him, so that He may work on our hearts, and so that we may ‘taste and see that the Lord is good. (Ps. 34:8).²

Physical, Not Just Spiritual

While the fight to see God is a spiritual one, we cannot discount how much our physical condition affects it. Fasting is one example of a physical act that is meant to produce a spiritual result. Our bodies, minds, and spirits are inherently connected. What happens to one impacts the others. Therefore, even in the quest to see God with spiritual sight, there is a physical aspect. The condition of our bodies matters.

We have all likely experienced the connection between our bodies and our minds. When we are sick our minds don’t work as effectively. For me, when I eat a heavy lunch, I have a much harder time doing mental work effectively for the rest of the afternoon. On the other hand, when I have a light lunch, my brain works better.

I think we would all agree that our minds are essential in the pursuit of seeing God. Paul tells Timothy to ‘*Think* over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything’ (2 Tim.2:7, emphasis added). In other words, use your brain to seek the Lord. If our brains are essential tools in knowing and seeing God, and if it is true that the condition of our bodies affects the ability of our minds, it follows that the condition of our bodies is an important factor in our pursuit to see God.

Jonathan Edwards once wrote,

By a sparingness in diet, and eating as much as may be what is light and easy of digestion, I shall doubtless be able to think more clearly, and shall gain time; 1. By lengthening out my life; 2. Shall need less time for digestion, after meals; 3. Shall be able to study more closely, without injury to my health; 4. Shall need less time for sleep; 5. Shall more seldom be troubled with the head-ache.³

Now, we must be careful not to be legalistic here. There is a time for enjoying a cheeseburger and fries to the glory of God. But Edwards

2. In my opinion, the best book on spiritual disciplines is: Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, (Colorado Springs: by NavPress, 2014).

3. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Volume One* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1974), 35.

makes an important point about diet and care for the body and mind. Specifically, his example should convince us that many Christians have not allowed the gospel and the pursuit of seeing God to infect and reform their eating and exercise habits. This is not to say that every Christian needs to be in peak physical shape, but I think it does highlight the fact that if we do not practice self-restraint and discipline in our physical lives, we will typically be preventing ourselves from a deeper level of knowledge of and communion with God. It is an error characteristic of our times to think the body and the spirit have no connection, and therefore it does not matter how we treat our bodies.

Martin Lloyd-Jones, in his classic work *Spiritual Depression*, wrote:

You cannot isolate the spiritual from the physical for we are body, mind and spirit. The greatest and the best Christians when they are physically weak are more prone to an attack of spiritual depression than at any other time and there are great illustrations of this in the Scriptures.⁴

This carries even more weight when we consider that Lloyd-Jones spent the first part of his adult life working as an acclaimed doctor in England. During those years he gained renown for his skills in diagnosing ailments and disease, as well as treating the whole person, not just the patient's physical symptoms.

The Choice Between What Is Great, and What Is Easy

In the last chapter, we saw A. W. Tozer's claim that God has made faith—seeing God with the eyes of our hearts—easy. By this, he did not mean that it requires no effort, but rather that God has made it *accessible* to all. In this chapter, we have found that while God may reveal Himself to the hearts of anyone at any time, seeing God is typically the result of a disciplined and consistent effort. This is not self-reliant will power, but grace-infused and Spirit-fueled hard work. Author and preacher Tim Keller, in his book on prayer, said, 'I can think of nothing great that is also easy.'⁵ True for prayer. True for seeing God. But is not beholding the glory of God worth every effort?

4. Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, 19.

5. Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Penguin, 2014), Kindle loc. 390.

YOU MUST WORK HARD TO SEE GOD

In our pursuit to see God we will discipline our bodies (1 Cor. 9:27), we will think hard with our minds (2 Tim. 2:7), we will practice spiritual habits that lead us closer to God, and we will read, read, and read God's Word until we can read no more. Do you want to see God no matter what it takes? If you do, you will. 'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart' (Jer. 29:13).

To paraphrase one of the great lines from literature... there will be a time when we must choose between what is great, and what is easy. What will you choose? Will you settle for what pastor and author Wilbur Rees called '\$3.00 Worth of God'? Or will you refuse to be satisfied, to put in the time and the energy and the sacrifice, to get a glimpse of His glory?

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.

Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but
just enough to equal a cup of warm milk

or a snooze in the sunshine.

I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man
or pick beets with a migrant.

I want ecstasy, not transformation.

I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.

I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.⁶

6. Wilber E. Rees, *\$3.00 Worth of God* (King of Prussia: Judson, 1971), 5.