

Reading
with
Leader's
Guide

VINTAGE
Saints & Sinners

A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

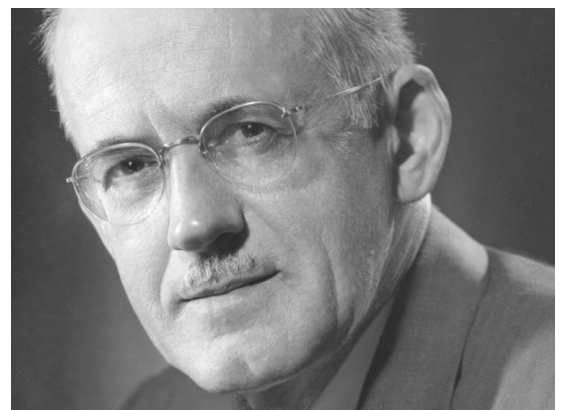
1 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. I Cor. 10:31

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. As we are compelled by the necessities of living to be always crossing back and forth from the one to the other, our inner lives tend to break up so that we live a divided instead of a unified life.

Our trouble springs from the fact that we who follow Christ inhabit at once two worlds, the spiritual and the natural. As children of Adam we live our lives on earth subject to the limitations of the flesh and the weaknesses and ills to which human nature is heir. Merely to live among men requires of us years of hard toil and much care and attention to the things of this world. In sharp contrast to this is our life in the Spirit. There we enjoy another and higher kind of life; we are children of God; we possess heavenly status and enjoy intimate fellowship with Christ.

This tends to divide our total life into two departments. We come unconsciously to recognize two sets of actions. The first are performed with a feeling of satisfaction and a firm assurance that they are pleasing to God. These are the sacred acts and they are usually thought to be prayer, Bible reading, hymn singing, church attendance and such other acts as spring directly from faith. ...Over against these sacred acts are the secular ones. They include all of the ordinary activities of life which we share with the sons and daughters of Adam: eating, sleeping, working, looking after the needs of the body and performing our dull and prosaic duties here on earth. These we often do reluctantly and with many misgivings, often apologizing to God for what we consider a waste of time and strength. The upshot of this is that we are uneasy most of the time. We go about our common tasks with a feeling of deep frustration, telling ourselves pensively that there's a better day coming when we shall slough off this earthly shell and be bothered no more with the affairs of this world.

This is the old sacred-secular antithesis. Most Christians are caught in its trap. They cannot get a satisfactory adjustment between the claims of the two worlds. They try to walk the tight rope between two kingdoms and they find no peace in either. Their strength is reduced, their outlook confused and their joy taken from them. I believe this state of affairs to be wholly unnecessary; the dilemma is not real. It is a creature of misunderstanding. The sacred-secular antithesis has no foundation in the New Testament. Without doubt a more perfect understanding of Christian truth will deliver us from it.



In your own words—how would you describe the problem Tozer is trying to address? Is this an urgent problem in your own experience?

Do you feel that your life is divided into two departments—the sacred & the secular?

Which parts of your life are “sacred” and which are “secular”?

What emotions come up for you around this kind of thinking?

Or is your life fragmented in other ways? How? Describe which parts of your life are most satisfying—and which parts are most frustrating. What are the sources of the conflicts you feel?

Is there anything that Tozer has said so far that you strongly agree with? Is there anything you'd like to question?

2 The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is our perfect example, and He knew no divided life. In the Presence of His Father He lived on earth without strain from babyhood to His death on the cross. God accepted the offering of His total life, and made no distinction between act and act. 'I do always the things that please him,' was His brief summary of His own life as it related to the Father. (John 8:29)

Paul's exhortation to 'do all to the glory of God' is more than pious idealism. It opens before us the possibility of making every act of our lives contribute to the glory of God. Lest we should be too timid to include everything, Paul mentions specifically eating and drinking. This humble privilege we share with the beasts that perish. If these lowly animal acts can be so performed as to honor God, then it becomes difficult to conceive of one that cannot....

Let us think of a Christian believer ... Of such a one it may be said that every act of his life is or can be as truly sacred Sacrament is an external expression of an inward grace. By one act of consecration of our total selves to God, we need no more be ashamed of our body (the fleshly servant that carries us through life) than Jesus was of the humble beast upon which He rode into Jerusalem. 'The Lord hath heed of him' may well apply to our mortal bodies. If Christ dwells in us we may bear about the Lord of glory as the little beast did of old and give occasion to the multitudes to cry, 'Hosanna in the highest.'

We must practice living to the glory of God, actually and determinedly. By meditation upon this truth, by talking it over with God often in our prayers, by recalling it to our minds frequently as we move about among men, a sense of its wondrous meaning will begin to take hold of us. The old painful duality will go down before a restful unity of life. The knowledge that we are all God's, that He has received all and rejected nothing, will unify our inner lives and make everything sacred to us. ... 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. Let us practice the fine art of making every work a priestly ministration. Let us believe that God is in all our simple deeds and learn to find Him there. ... {From *The Sacrament of Living*}

Tozer says that Jesus lived no divided life. What does that mean to you? What do you see in Jesus' life that demonstrates his unified life?

Tozer uses the word "sacrament". How would you talk about that word to someone who is not familiar with the church?

Is there anything in this reading that adds to your understanding of your own mortal body? How can you be more like that donkey who carried Jesus?

How can we "practice living to the glory of God" in a concrete way every day?

If you were going to make a sign to remind you of what Tozer is teaching, what would you write on it?

Do you know anyone who practices this fine art of making their works a priestly ministration? How do they actually live that out?

Is there a phrase or sentence in this reading that you would highlight or underline? Read it out for the group.

3 *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. - Matt. 5:3*

Before the Lord God made man upon the earth He first prepared for him by creating a world of useful and pleasant things for his sustenance and delight... They 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. Within him was God; without, a thousand gifts which God had showered upon him. But sin has introduced complications and has made those very gifts of God a potential source of ruin to the soul.

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. Men have now by nature no peace within their hearts, for God is crowned there no longer, but there in the moral dusk stubborn and aggressive usurpers fight among themselves for first place on the throne. This is an accurate analysis of our real spiritual trouble... Our Lord referred to this tyranny of things when He said to His disciples, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it."

Tozer says that he has identified the accurate analysis of our real spiritual trouble. How would you describe this in your own words? Do you think he's got it right? Or do you have a different idea about our central spiritual dilemma?

What would be one example of a time when you've seen God's good gifts become a source of ruin? How did that happen?

What different things have you seen at the center of people's "central shrine"?

Can you describe a time when you saw a person living in balance—as God created them to be?

Is it possible to love another person too much? Why or why not?

What comes to your own mind when you hear the familiar verse, "whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it"?

4 As is frequently true, this New Testament principle of spiritual life finds its best illustration in the Old Testament. In the story of Abraham and Isaac we have a dramatic picture of the surrendered life...Abraham was old when Isaac was born, old enough indeed to have been his grandfather, and the child became at once the delight and idol of his heart. From that moment when he first stooped to take the tiny form awkwardly in his arms he was an eager love slave of his son...The baby represented everything sacred to his father's heart: the promises of God, the covenants, the hopes of the years and the long messianic dream. As he watched him grow from babyhood to young manhood the heart of the old man was knit closer and closer with the life of his son, till at last the relationship bordered upon the perilous. It was then that God stepped in to save both father and son from the consequences of an uncleansed love.

"Take now thy son," said God to Abraham, "thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." The sacred writer spares us a close-up of the agony that night on the slopes near Beersheba when the aged man had it out with his God, but respectful imagination may view in awe the bent form and convulsive wrestling alone under the stars. Possibly not again until a Greater than Abraham wrestled in the Garden of Gethsemane did such mortal pain visit a human soul...How should he slay the lad! Even if he could get the consent of his wounded and protesting heart, how could he reconcile the act with the promise, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called"? This was Abraham's trial by fire, and he did not fail in the crucible.

While the stars still shone like sharp white points above the tent where the sleeping Isaac lay, and long before the gray dawn had begun to lighten the east, the old saint had made up his mind. He would offer his son as God had directed him to do, and then trust God to raise him from the dead. This, says the writer to the Hebrews, was the solution his aching heart found sometime in the dark night, and he rose "early in the morning" to carry out the plan. It is beautiful to see that, while he erred as to God's method, he had correctly sensed the secret of His great heart. And the solution accords well with the New Testament Scripture, "Whosoever will lose for my sake shall find."

What thoughts and emotions come to you when we recount the story of Abraham and Isaac?

What questions do you have about that Bible story?

Tozer uses the phrase "uncleansed love". What do you think he means by that?

Do you agree with Tozer's account of why God calls Abraham to take Isaac's life? Could there be any other reason at play?

If you could speak to Abraham during his night of agony, what would you say to him?

5 God let the suffering old man go through with it up to the point where He knew there would be no retreat, and then forbade him to lay a hand upon the boy. To the wondering patriarch He now says in effect, "It's all right, Abraham. I never intended that you should actually slay the lad. I only wanted to remove him from the temple of your heart that I might reign unchallenged there. I wanted to correct the perversion that existed in your love. Now you may have the boy, sound and well. Take him and go back to your tent. Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." Then heaven opened and a voice was heard saying to him, "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

The old man of God lifted his head to respond to the Voice, and stood there on the mount strong and pure and grand, a man marked out by the Lord for special treatment, a friend and favorite of the Most High. Now he was a man wholly surrendered, a man utterly obedient, a man who possessed nothing. He had concentrated his all in the person of his dear son, and God had taken it from him. 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.

I have said that Abraham possessed nothing. Yet was not this poor man rich? Everything he had owned before was his still to enjoy: sheep, camels, herds, and goods of every sort. He had also his wife and his friends, and best of all he had his son Isaac safe by his side. He had everything, but he possessed nothing. There is the spiritual secret. There is the sweet theology of the heart which can be learned only in the school of renunciation....The sense of possession was gone from his heart. Things had been cast out forever. They had now become external to the man. His inner heart was free from them. The world said, "Abraham is rich," but the aged patriarch only smiled. He could not explain it to them, but he knew that he owned nothing, that his real treasures were inward and eternal....

We are often hindered from giving up our treasures to the Lord out of fear for their safety...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. ...Our whole future will be conditioned by the choice we make. {from *The Pursuit of God*}

What does Tozer teach you about possession and renunciation?

Why are you afraid to give up your own treasures?

Tozer says, "Everything is safe which we commit to Him, and nothing is really safe which is not so committed."

What does that word "safe" mean to you?

How can you keep God in God's proper place in your own life? Have you ever felt tested in your intimacy with God? Talk about that experience.

What do you find helpful in Tozer's insights? What are you still puzzling over?

Quotes for Reflection

"God must do everything for us. Our part is to yield and trust."

"To men and women everywhere Jesus says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." 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."

"God is so vastly wonderful, so utterly and completely delightful that He can, without anything other than Himself, meet and overflow the deepest demands of our total nature, mysterious and deep as that nature is."

"God never hurries. There are no deadlines against which he must work. Only to know this is to quiet our spirits and relax our nerves."

"If we cooperate with Him in loving obedience, God will manifest Himself to us, and that manifestation will be the difference between a nominal Christian life and a life radiant with the light of His face."

"We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. He is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts"

"To have found God and still to pursue Him is the soul's paradox of love."

"Always, everywhere God is present, and always He seeks to discover Himself to each one."

"The world is perishing for lack of the knowledge of God and the Church is famishing for want of His Presence."

"You can see God from anywhere if your mind is set to love and obey Him."

"He had everything, but he possessed nothing. There is the spiritual secret."

"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.”

Have different participants read each of these quotes one by one—without discussion in this round. Take your time—with pauses in between for reflection.

After you’ve read all of these out loud, ask the group. “Which of these quotes would you like to memorize and take into your heart? Would you read it out loud again for the group? And then tell us: Why do you find it meaningful?”

This section can also be used at the beginning of the session as a warm up!