

In Pursuit of God (The Life of A.W. Tozer) by James L. Snyder, Bethany House Publishers (2009) (26 Quotes compiled by Doug Nichols)

1. Living by Faith

“A few preachers have found a happy solution to the economic problem in the simple plan of living by faith. No one can put the economic squeeze on such a man; for as he is accountable to God alone for his ministry. God is, by the same token, responsible for his daily bread. It is impossible to starve a man into submission under this arrangement, for the servant of God lives on manna and manna can be found wherever faith can see it.” [Page 60]

2. Knowing God First, Self-education Second

“As far as he was concerned there was no substitute for knowing God first hand He brought the same attitude to knowledge in general. Tozer possessed an intellectual appetite that was not easily satisfied. He developed a remarkable program of self-education and read voraciously and widely His breadth of knowledge was wrested single-handedly from the books he read. [Page 66]

3. Gaining Knowledge Through Reading

“What set Tozer apart was his ability to quickly assimilate the knowledge he gained from reading. Tozer was more than a reader - he was a thinker. He often counseled, ‘You should think 10 times more than you read’ This was his own practice throughout his life. By doing his own thinking, he arrived at his own independent conclusions.” [Page 67]

4. Listening to God

“Tozer said he would only read a book until he came to the point where God spoke to him. Then he would close the book and listen to the words of God rather than the words of men. Apparently he didn’t finish many books. (Stan Lemon) [Page 83]

“Although Dr. Tozer’s art form was language and literature, his interest ranged in other areas, especially music. During the last years of his life he became quite a lover of Bach and Beethoven, although I think he admired Beethoven more. (In fact, on one occasion he expressed his desire to have the ‘Missa Solemnis’ performed at his funeral.) At home in the evenings he would often lie and listen to great music. I remember Ravel’s ‘Bolero’ was a particular favorite. He claimed it relaxed him, a statement that taxed my imagination! (Raymond McAfee)” [Page 83]

5. Spirit of Worship/Mind in Literature & Philosophy

“Tozer polished his spirit in worship, and his mind in great literature and philosophy, ‘McAfee said” [Page 105]

6. Constant Reading, Studying, Thinking, and Writing

“Sermon preparation was a constant process with Tozer. It did not matter if he was riding a streetcar or train or if someone was driving him to an appointment across town. He would get settled in his seat and immediately out would come a book. It might be a book he was reading at the time or a spiral notebook in which he would jot down sermon notes. He was constantly reading and studying and thinking and writing.” [Page 106]

7. Against Clichés

“Tozer early realized that to be effective in preaching, he would have to develop sensitivity and precision in the use of words. He developed sensitivity and precision in the use of words. He developed an aversion to what he called ‘dead words’ and led a vigorous crusade against clichés. After becoming editor of ALLIANCE LIFE, he issued an ‘Index Prohibitorum’ of words and phrases he considered overworked or spent and no longer worthy of use. He insisted that these be excised from any manuscript accepted for publication.” [Page 108]

8. Figurative Language

“Tozer’s illustrations could be grotesque, as when he likened reading a new Bible translation with optional alternate renderings to ‘shaving a banana.’ But invariably he got his point across. Listeners knew what he meant. Even in private conversation he spoke figuratively, due, no doubt, to his training and reading. [Page 110]

9. Correct Principles, Not Individuals

“Tozer could be hard-hitting he felt the occasion demanded it. Invited by a holiness church to speak at the dedication of a new sanctuary, he suffered through a lengthy program of what he considered inappropriate levity topped by a women’s trio who sang a selection of popular secular songs. When it came his turn to speak, he scrapped his prepared sermon.

‘What is the matter with you holiness people?’ Tozer began. ‘You used to have standards, but now the only way to tell that you are Christians is if you tell us.’ And, as only Tozer could, he took that entire assembled congregation to the spiritual woodshed for an unforgettable chastening.”

“Tozer never publicly attacked individuals or churches that might have strayed from the truth. ‘If a denomination does something that we object to and we attack it, we shall have a little war on our hands. If we deal with its wrongs in a broader way, we correct the abuse and warn others against it without naming those involved. When you lay down spiritual rules and deep-lying principles and show that they are violated in current Christianity, you can trust intelligent people to make their own applications.’” [Page 112]

10. Read and Use the Classics

“Tozer never gloried in his lack of formal education. ‘I believe, ‘he insisted, ‘a preacher must be as educated as he possibly can be.

“Never read a ‘good book,’ ‘he cautioned “There are many good books being published every year. The majority of them merely rehash what someone else has written. Go back to the classics and learn from them. Read some of the great Puritan authors and some of the mystics. Read and memorize good poetry. Observe how these writers express themselves.

“To develop verbal skill, Tozer offered these masters for study; John Bunyan for simplicity, Joseph Addison for clarity and elegance; John Milton for nobility and consistent elevation of thought; Charles Dickens for sprightliness (start with A Christmas Carol’); Francis Bacon for conciseness and dignity. In addition, Tozer recommended Robert Louis Stevenson, John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, Nathaniel Hawthorne and the poetry of Wordsworth, Bryant, Blake, Keats and Shelley.” [Page 114]

11. Using the Right Word

“Become word conscious’ he would extort. ‘Pay attention to words and the effect they have. Get and use a good dictionary. If you come across an unfamiliar word, look it up immediately and study. In that way you are building your vocabulary all the time. Some would have you believe that a large vocabulary will cause you to speak over the heads of people. Actually, the opposite is the case. With a large vocabulary you are able to be precise in what you say. Nothing takes the place of using the right word’ One of the trademarks of Tozer’s preaching was his ability to have the right word always at his command” [Page 115]

12. Remember to Keep Being Sensitive

“Plain speech is to be admired, but a lot that passes for plain is simply rude. The trouble with the man who boasts that he calls a spade a spade is that he often ends by calling everything a spade. He sneers at every tender emotion, brands with the name of spade every simple human joy, and is buried at last with a spade - the latter office being perhaps the kindest one that humble implement ever performed for him. May God keep fresh the fountain of our laughter and our tears!” [Page 116]

13. Christian Writing Imitating the World

“Once he was invited to speak at an annual conference of Christian writers in Chicago. The director was introduced to Dr. Tozer and began to explain to him the reason for the conference. ‘Our purpose here, Dr. Tozer, is to encourage beginning writers to perfect their technique.’ In an absent sort of way Dr. Tozer nodded affirmatively.

The director of the conference was acquainted with Tozer but only by reputation and was completely unprepared for what happened. Much to the director's horror, Tozer proceeded to tear apart in no uncertain terms the idea that Christian fiction was a legitimate means of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was a blistering attack on Christian writers who used fiction to communicate the truths of Jesus Christ.

He began his presentation by confessing that his was a minority report and that he must disagree with good friends. He then proceeded to talk about 'The Cult of Imitation,' 'The Cult of Entertainment' and 'The Cult of the Celebrity.' His charges were that Christian writers of the day no longer innovated but rather were too involved in imitating the world. He pointed out what he called a destructive heresy that religion is a form of entertainment. 'This has given us,' Tozer said, 'a type of religious fiction that is unrealistic, affected and false.' He was also totally against the idea that a work of literature could be built around the converted celebrity. To emphasize his point he quoted from St. Ignatius, 'Apart from [Christ] let nothing dazzle you [Page 122]

14. Bogged Down by Minutia

"During a business session at a Christian and Missionary Alliance General Council, the delegates were bogged down in motions and amendments and amendments to amendments. Tozer became increasingly impatient with the tedium of it all. Finally, his restless spirit could take no more. He turned to Raymond McAfee sitting beside him.

'Come on, McAfee,' he whispered, 'let's go up to my room and pray before I lose all my religion. [Page 143]

15. Praying to God, Not Man

"Once Dr. Louis L. King, Tozer and two other preachers were engaged in a half day of prayer. One of the preachers was known for his bombastic, colorful speech both in his preaching and his praying. This man began praying for a certain world leader who at the time was hindering missionary work. 'If you can't change him, ' the preacher prayed, 'then kill him and take him to heaven!' Later Tozer took King aside. 'Did you hear what he prayed this morning?' he asked, a hurt expression on his face. "'Take him to heaven'? Why he doesn't even believe in Jesus Christ. That wasn't prayer. He was saying that for our benefit. You never speak to God in that fashion. When you approach God you should always use reverent language. It's God not man, we're talking to in prayer!" [Page 146]

16. Spend Time to Know God

'Rebelling against the hectic schedules that kept his fellow ministers and fellow Christians from true worship, Tozer wrote, 'I am convinced that the dearth of great saints in these times, even among those who truly believe in Christ, is due at least in part to our unwillingness to give sufficient time to the cultivation of the knowledge of

God.. Our religious activities should be ordered in such a way as to leave plenty of time for the cultivation of the fruits of solitude and silence. [Page 149]

17. Good Theology in Old Hymns

“After the Bible, ‘he said in an ALLIANCE LIFE article aimed at new Christians, ‘the next most valuable book is a good hymnal. Let any new Christian spend a year prayerfully meditating on the hymns of Watts and Wesley alone, and he or she will become a fine theologian.’ Then he added, ‘Afterward, let that person read a balanced diet of the Puritans and the Christian mystics. The results will be more wonderful than he could have dreamed’ This was his personal pattern, year after year. [Page 150]

18. Preparing for the Judgment Seat of Christ

“Just before Haire was to return to his homeland, he stopped by Chicago to say good-bye.

‘Well, Tom,’ Tozer remarked, ‘I guess you’ll be going back to Ireland to preach.’

‘No,’ Tom replied in his thick Irish brogue. ‘I intend to cancel all appointments for the next six months and spend that time preparing for the judgment seat of Christ while I can still do something about it.’ It was an attitude not uncharacteristic of Tozer himself. [Page 150]

19. Mentors Knowing God, Not Man

‘For inner nourishment, Tozer turned constantly to these matters of the inner life. He sat long and lovingly at the feet of these saintly teachers drawing water from their wells with reverence and gratitude. He lifted thankful eyes to God for the men and women who taught him to desire the better way: Nicholas Herman of Lorraine, Nicholas of Cusa, Meister Eckhart, Frederick William Faber, Madame Jeanne Guyon. Only two stipulations did Tozer make: that his teachers must know God as Carlyle said, ‘otherwise than by hearsay,’ and that Christ must be all in all to them.” [Page 159]

20. Bible Teaching and Bible Teachers

“In frequent lectures to young preachers he sought for those who would join his ‘Fellowship of the Burning Heart, ‘who would pay the price and, like himself take a mystical approach to the ministry. He issued a distinct call for modern-day prophets. [Page 160]

Tozer recognized there are in the church today many good men of spotless - splendid, Spirit-filled teachers. ‘I’m profoundly grateful for these men and have benefited from their ministry,’ he would say. ‘But I believe the times call for a few men who will be specially anointed and endued with gifts peculiarly suited to the needs of this hour. These men will know the mind of God for their day and will speak with calm assurance. They will be in one sense prophets to their generation.

‘It will cost you everything to follow the Lord,’ Tozer told these young men, ‘and it will cost you more to be God’s man for the hour. Anybody can go around and teach the Bible. Many do it and do it well. Many pastors do well in building up a congregation by Bible teaching, and we need Bible teaching and Bible teachers. But there is a tremendous need for prophets in each generation. These are the spiritual originals, the God-intoxicated few, who, in every age, have spoken God’s clear message into the duller ears of the multitudes. [Page 160]

21. Holy Spirit Needs More of Us

“We do not need to worry about getting more of the Holy Spirit, but see to it that He gets more of us. We can have all of Him if He can get all of us. [Page 162]

22. Love of Poetry

“Poet Percy Bysshe Shelley described poetry as the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. Anatole France compared a beautiful poem to a violin bow drawn across the fibers of our souls, setting not only the thoughts of the poet but our own souls to singing. Those who produced it often did so at great personal sacrifice. Wordsworth confessed that his poetry never brought in enough to buy shoestrings.” [Page 165]

23. Eternalness of God

“Thou hadst no youth, great God
An Unbeginning End Thou art;
Thy glory in itself abode
And still abides in its own tranquil heart:
No age can heap its outward years on Thee:
Dear God! Thou art Thyself Thine own eternity” [Page 171]

24. Persecution of Separated Believers

“Tozer knew that the way of the cross is unpopular and brings a measure of reproach on those who take it. Rarely do separated Christians escape a certain amount of hatred in their lifetimes. After they have been dead a while, time and distance may soften the lines of the portrait and the world that hated them while they lived will sometimes praise them when they are gone. John Wesley and his Methodists are good examples of this strange phenomenon. They are scorned and derided while on earth, considered off scourgings to be persecuted or worse. But now we sing their hymns and build their sepulchers. History records the abuses heaped upon them for their perfectionism’ and for their irrepressible joy that embarrassed people and made them hurry away.” [Page 172]

25. Song is the Effect of Revival

“Someone has advanced the idea that if we would have a revival, we should begin to sing; that revivals always come on the wings of song. It is true that revivals and song always go together, but the song is the effect of the revival, never the cause of it. Men are not revived because they sing; they sing because they are revived. It is coldness of heart that has caused us to lose the joy and zest from our singing. The revived heart will soon burst into song.” [Page 176]

26. Nothing between You and the Lord

“You must be willing to give up your friends,’ Tozer would often say, ‘if you want to have the Friend.’ Friends and God were incompatible, in Tozer’s thinking, and he never permitted anything to come between him and his Lord. He forsook all -literally to follow Jesus.” [Page 193]