

'A Life of Victory in the Midst of Trouble'

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of victory in the midst of trouble, using the example of David's life in the 25th Psalm.

Scripture: Psalm 25:6, Psalm 25:21

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "Victory in Trials"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes that a life of victory is possible even amidst troubles, drawing from Psalm 25, where David expresses his struggles as a good man in a bad world. Tozer highlights that true Christianity is not confined to classrooms but is lived out in the everyday challenges of life, where faith must meet reality. He encourages believers to trust in God's loyalty and to maintain communication with Him through prayer, especially during times of distress and affliction. The sermon underscores that the only true enemy is sin, and overcoming it requires sincere prayer and reliance on God's mercy. Ultimately, Tozer reassures that God is present and faithful, guiding those who seek Him through their trials.

Transcript

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February 6, 1955

Now, the 25th Psalm is the text for the morning. I do not intend to attempt anything like careful exposition, but simply let our minds play over the psalm. We have read it previously. If I were to pick a text out, maybe it might be the twenty-first. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait on Thee.

Now in this psalm, we have a little section of a great spiritual autobiography where the man David is writing himself into this. He is telling us about himself and his relation to God and the world. And we see and hear in this 25th Psalm, a living man engaged in the business of living. We see here a good man living in a bad world. A right man living in a wrong world. And naturally, here it's not a smooth psalm.

My brethren, nothing is ever smooth if it is a realistic, fair reflection of life. The life of our Lord Jesus Christ was not a smooth life. He had great inward tranquility, for he knew He was in the bosom of the Father. And He knew that not even His incarnation took Him out of the bosom of the Father. For He knew that the Persons of the Godhead are indivisible. You cannot divide the Son from the Father by incarnation or by crucifixion or by death. He knew that He could never be separated from the Father's heart, though as a

man among men He lived his turbulent life, his life surrounded by enemies so that I think it's fair to say that if you're living too smooth a life, you may well question whether you're living in the will of God or not.

David served his generation by the will of God before he fell on sleep. And David was a man after God's own heart. So, I think it fair to take him for an example. And David did not live a smooth, tranquil life. He had periods of tranquility. He had times when his heart soared away like a lark and sang in heaven's gate. But he soon found himself down on the earth again, back in the in the turbulent and disturbed world where he had to live.

Now, we do not find here what we find in much modern religion, a man in a classroom learning and analyzing. We have taken on the classroom psychology too much in Christian religion in these days. Classrooms are necessary and this is not intended to be any reflection upon the classroom. It is only to say that the classroom is an abnormal situation. It is something apart from the stream of life, hoping that it will teach those who are in that classroom when they do go back into the stream of life to live better, more wisely. But it is for the moment, not a part of life really. It is the ivory tower of life.

Christianity is never to be understood, the faith of our fathers is never to be thought of from the classroom. It is not someone looking over heavy glasses, telling them the facts of Christianity or using a chart to illustrate. But, the faith of our fathers is the faith of the plain people, the faith of men living in the world.

The faith of our fathers is fitted to the marketplace where men argue and debate and cheat. The man of God won't cheat, but he'll likely be cheated. The faith of our fathers is geared to the kitchen and the home where the Christian housewife answers the phone and the doorbell a dozen times every morning and the baby suddenly runs the temperature and the doctor is out of town and she's in distress and then the doorbell rings again. And then the phone and it's a wrong number. And that's her life. She's got to have something that'll go down there. The classroom can't help her there. Nothing abstract and theoretical can do her any good there. The faith of our fathers has to get into the kitchen, into the home, into the nursery, into the basement, and where people are engaged in the downright, tough business of living right in a wrong world. The faith of our father has to get into the cab of the truck as it bowls down the highway, around the curves until the arms ache. And out on the long straight away stretches until the monotony puts us to sleep, and trouble everywhere and angry horns honking from the rear, and blowouts and difficulties. There is no classroom there. There is no theory there. No ivory tower there. Christianity has to get into that cab and behind that wheel and into the heart of that man so that he can do that like a Christian and drive his big truck like a Christian. The faith of our fathers has to get into the machine shop, where the smell of hot oil and dirty gloves and dirty overalls and cursing men and hard to please customers; and it's got to be there and it's got to prove itself there and live right there and be right there.

And so, the 25th Psalm is an illustration of all this, a man in the midst of life, a good man living in a bad world, a right man living in a wrong world, God's man living in the devil's world. And he has to come through that; and has to live it through and suffer it out and come out all right. And that's why I like the Bible. It's a book of a high philosophy and lofty theology and brilliant metaphysics. But, it's as practical as your shoes you wear around the house or your bedroom slippers right down where you live and get into it and it doesn't fail you. And you don't have to know a million things and you don't have to rise in the scale of culture, nor study from Emily post where to put your spoon. Plain people that don't know what to do with a spoon.

A man told me one time that he went to a banquet that was so ritzy that it was one o'clock in the morning before it was through, and he found at one o'clock in the morning all he had left was a tablespoon. He'd evidentially used up the wrong one at the wrong place and the snooty waiter wouldn't take it away, so there he was. He said, at one o'clock and they were through eating and he had just a tablespoon lying by his plate. Well, that would chagrin some people and drive them to suicide. But, the plain fellow who lives in this bad world trying to live right with God isn't so much worried, because he knows that Christianity meets all situations, social situations, political situations, industrial situations.

So, here was the man David engaged in living, a living man living in a bad world. It was H.G. Wells, you know who said that Buddhism was the best religion, but that it wouldn't thrive except in a warm climate. Christianity will thrive in any climate at all. Just let Christ get into the heart of a man, and whether he is living in an igloo hut somewhere in the far Arctic, or whether he's living with but a G-string on somewhere in Africa. If he's a true sincere man, whether it's his grass hut or his snow igloo, Christianity will work. It will work in the mountains and it will work on the plains and it will work in the midst of the great city where we never see real sunshine for the smoke and the fumes. The faith of our fathers will work anywhere.

And H.G. Wells didn't mean to be funny, but it was a humorous thing to say that God Almighty should give the world a religion that will only work in a warm climate. If that was true, and that might be true of Buddhism, then what would we do in cold weather? Our spirituality would rise with the temperature. Every morning, you'd have to go out on the porch and say to your wife, I wonder how spiritual I can be today? And if it is a little too cold, you'd say, well, I'll be a sinner this day. I can't live for God today because it's too cold. Christianity is found everywhere. And it's found in the hearts of men.

You know, we've had some errors in the church, and one of them has been, of course, to make Christianity consist of theological dogma. Now, I'm a theological dogmatist, and I believe in theology. I believe in the faith of our fathers, and I can define it for you and put it down. And I could write a book of discipline if I had been forced to do it, telling what I believe and what people ought to believe. And I believe in doctrine. But what good is it going to do you to know that the Trinity is composed of three persons or that there are three persons in the Trinity is a better way of expressing it if you don't live pleasing to the Trinity. I borrowed that from an old saint who lived centuries ago. What does it profit thee to be able to discourse learnedly about the Trinity if I live such a life as to be displeasing to the Trinity? What difference does it make that you know that God made the heaven in the earth if you will live an ungodly life. Doctrine doesn't mean anything until it gets inside you until it seeps by osmosis into the bloodstream of your life. Leaks through the walls of your soul and gets into your bloodstream and gets out into the cells of your spirit and changes you. Any doctrine that doesn't change a man has never reached that man.

Too often we have a Christianity that consists merely of a lot of creeds held; doctrines that are believed. That's not Christianity. That is only the raw material of Christianity. Until the fire of the Holy Ghost comes upon that raw material, or changing the figure, that is but the food, that is but the meat of Christianity. But until that meat enters the soul of a man by faith and repentance, it can't do the man any good. Objective Christianity is not the Christianity of the Bible. The faith of our fathers is objective truths having become subjective reality within the soul by pertinence and faith and prayer.

Old John Ruskin, the famous art critic and philosopher and Christian, who a century ago or so wrote very eloquently about the error of calling this a church service. I still use it because I know what I mean by the word. But he says, watch that we're not mistaken about it. He said, we meet together and sing a few hymns and listen to moral or spiritual truth being expounded and go home and say we have been to a

service. And he says that not necessarily true. For service is more than singing hymns and going home again. Service is living for God and serving your generation and living like a Christian after the church doors are locked and the janitor is asleep. And it is living for Christ between Sunday night and Sunday morning; all week long as well as on Sunday. I think Ruskin was right though I do not follow him in throwing out the word church service as a result. It can be a service.

We can with giving our money to the Lord, we can do a service. We can by expounding the Scriptures, do a service. We can by singing hymns, do a service. But the danger is that it's possible to render that kind of service, aloof and in a vacuum all together unrelated to the rest of our lives. That's where the danger lies. And I agree with Ruskin there. So, let's watch it. If your Christianity, your Christian faith, does not affect every part of your being, you have a reason to wonder whether you have the faith of our fathers really in your heart or not.

Now, look at David. David here was a man in the midst of life. Here he was surrounded by, look at them: verse two to nineteen, enemies; verse nineteen, hatred; verse eighteen, affliction; verse seventeen, troubles; verse eighteen, pain; verse seventeen, distress; verse sixteen, desolation, and perplexities all the way through and sin mentioned three or four times. Now, there was a man, no ivory tower there. No monk sitting on top of a high pole letting somebody else feed him. No hermit hidden away in a cave going barefooted for a walk at sundown when the birds were singing. No impractical dreamer, but a man who lived in the midst of all of these enemies were surrounding him. Verses two to nineteen talk about his enemies.

Now, I might say that a man is known by his friends. I think that's generally understood. But the opposite is also true, a man is known by his enemies. No man worth his salt but will have enemies. If he does not have enemies, then he's not doing anything. If he does anything, he'll have enemies. If he does anything, he will have 100 telling him that he could have done it better if he had done it his way. And then we say what have you done? And the answer is, well, nothing but I've been observing. He hasn't done a thing, but he's been watching somebody else. You'll have kibitzers, fault finders, critics and enemies and opposers and ill-wishers no matter what you do, if you do something. The way to have no enemies is to have no convictions, and do nothing at all. The man without a conviction has only one enemy, and that's God. But, the man of conviction is bound to have enemies. And you will now be known by your enemies.

You should never worry if you'll get an enemy. But you should be very concerned with what kind of an enemy that is. If I knew that a communist lived down on Longwood Drive two doors from me. Now, I don't think there are any down, that Republican territory. But, if I knew there was a communist living down there, and he should turn out to be my enemy, I'd thank God to have a communist for my enemy. But, if he's a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and he's my enemy, I ought to be distressed about that. If you have the wrong kind of enemies, woe be to you. But if you have the right kind of enemies, blessed art thou for so the prophets fared before thee.

I might digress, as the preachers call it, from my sermon long enough to say to you young people, watch out who your pals are. You may never have done anything wrong. Nobody would ever, could be able to charge you with having done anything wrong. But, if you fall in with, and make pals of young fellows who are borderline delinquents, you'll be blamed for being a delinquent too and you will have a hard time proving you're not. If I don't know who you are, your name is John Doe, Jr. and somebody says, Pastor, do you know young John Doe, Jr., sixteen years old and I say I don't think I know John Doe. Well, he comes to our church sometimes, attends Sunday school class and goes to the, plays baseball Tuesday nights

during the summer. Well, what about John Doe Jr? What kind of fella is he? Well, my friend says, I can't tell you I don't want to commit myself, but I'll tell you who his friends are. And then he names some cigarette sucking, dirty tongue, borderline hoodlums, and says he runs around with them. I've got my opinion of John Doe Jr. without ever having anybody telling me anything. Somebody says that's guilt by association. Sure, it's guilt by association and the addled-headed egghead whoever said we shouldn't be able to attribute guilt by association, ought to go somewhere and have his head examined.

Birds of a feather flock together. And a bird that flocks with buzzards is bound to be a buzzard or smell like one. And if I see a necked creature flocking with buzzards and I go along and say stay away from that creature. What has he done? You can't prove anything on him. You haven't got a bit of proof he's done anything wrong? No, I have never seen him do anything wrong, but I know his crowd. So watch it you young people. But you say how can I win them if I don't go where they are? Did you ever hear of a fellow going to hell to win a man who wouldn't go to heaven? No. There's a place to stop. You can win them, but you don't have to win them by running with them. And if you run with them, you will not win them, they'll win you. If we had all the young people in this church now that have come to make some kind of Christian testimony, or at least been interested over the last twenty-five years, and then who've been lost to us through bad friendships, we couldn't contain them. They would fill every room in the building. They're gone. They do fall from churches because they get into wrong friendships. But that's only a side. That really is not part of the sermon.

This man was surrounded by enemies. And he was surrounded by hatred. Now that's an ugly thing. I don't like the word hatred. There it is, verse nineteen, bitter hatred. And always remember sin hates righteousness. Always remember that. And the better you are, the more sin will hate you.

And then here was affliction. Now that's verse eight and verse eighteen. Now, Job's experience interprets the word affliction here. In James, we have it. If any man is afflicted, let him pray. That doesn't mean sick. That means if anybody is in trouble, like Job was. He may be sick, but that's only a part of his affliction. You can get afflicted without being sick and you can be sick without really being afflicted because affliction means loss or bereavement, or having Job's comforters comfort you. That was the kind of trouble Job had. He had a sickness too temporarily. But that was affliction. Well, Job had it and here it was. You say, will faith operate? Is the faith of our fathers good at a time when we have enemies, at a time when there's hatred, at a time when there's affliction? The answer is yes. Here was a man living in the middle of it and triumphant.

And there's troubles, verse seventeen. I don't know all the troubles. And a man that isn't significant enough in the universe for God to let him have troubles is too insignificant for God to find. If you're significant, if you signify, if you mean anything in the world, you will have troubles all right. Paul's experience shows that. Read Second Corinthians and see what a time of it Paul had. Poor old Paul, his brethren and his enemies and the Jews and the Gentiles and everybody was after him.

And then there's pain, verse eighteen. Do you know what I would like to be able to do? I wish I could stand here and say, believe on Jesus Christ, live as a Christian should, and thou shalt be free from pain. I wish I could do that, but I can't do that. As He was, so are we in this world. And as my Father has sent Me, so send I you. And in one sense, Jesus is living over again His life in each one of us. And He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with pain and He bore it and He knew it.

Now, you might as well brace yourself for it. You're going to suffer some pain in your lifetime. And there never has been a place in the human body yet found that was convenient for pain to lodge. Wherever you're hurt, you wish it was somewhere else. And you say that's always the most inconvenient place, and I could stand it if it was somewhere else. And then if it got to the other place, you'd want it somewhere else. There is no place where you can bear pain conveniently. Pain is always a rude, uncouth, barbarian, sadistic thing. And it'll come all right. You can figure on it.

It was Shakespeare that said, no man is a philosopher when he has a toothache. It's alright to sit back in our ivory tower and philosophize about the heaven and earth and the things that are therein. But, when you get a toothache, you don't have so much success in your ivory tower. But Christianity is good where there is pain. Oh, the pain of the people of God down the years. Read Foxes "Book of Martyrs." Read any good biography and see if it's not true that the people of God have known pain. And our Lord said oh so tenderly to His suffering church, fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. He didn't say pray to Me and I'll deliver you from your suffering. He said fear none of those things which thou can suffer. Always remember, you can suffer. You can. And when the human organism won't take it anymore, you'll die. But you can suffer. So, brace yourself and thank God for the privilege of feeling a little bit of the sting and the gall and the bitterness that our Lord felt when He was on earth.

David had it. Verse eighteen talked about pain, verse seventeen talked about distress. Now, distress of course is pain, mental and physical, mainly psychological or mental. And you know how distressing mental pain is. It's more distressing than physical pain. I think it can be proved that rarely does it happen that a man commits suicide because of physical pain. Almost always it's because of mental distress.

And then there's desolation, verse sixteen. Desolation, the grief of loneliness. I saw a picture in the newspaper here I think yesterday of a man being held back by policemen. And I'll never, I think, for many long months, forget that face. Five of his children were just burned to death in the building. But, it was gone to a point where no living organism could exist a second in that awful furnace. And this man was going to rush in there and try to rescue at least one. And they were holding him, and that face I'll never forget it, I think. Brother, when the fire was out, and the hashes were being raked and that man sat alone, you know what desolation meant.

Some of you had a husband that has walked out of the house and left you. Poor thing. The worst part about it was when he went. He took part of you along with him. He took the part that lives and vibrates. He took your heart with him. And you scolded yourself for it but you can't help it. Like the mother whose son has been nothing but a rascal from the time he was ten years old, a scoundrel. Now, he's in prison. She can't help it. Her mind doesn't function. It's her emotions, her nerves, her heart. She loves that no-good boy until she's in prison. When they walk lockstep, she's walking. When the clank of the door goes shut and the great iron key turns, it's turned on her. And when he wears the prison gray, she wears that prison gray. She can't help it. Her heart has been so tied up with that no-good boy, and yet, I don't know why I should use the word no-good. Jesus died for him. And so, Jesus died for him, he is worth praying for and maybe will be saved. But anyway, she loves that boy.

So, some of you have had that happen to you and you've been desolate. I've had them come to me like that and sit with gray faces and tell me in a voice that was not a normal voice that everything was gone. That the only one that meant anything to me in the world has forsaken me. And I've had men come to me and sit embarrassed and twist their gloves in their hands and tell me about the wife that had walked out. Poor guy, if he could do something if there was something there you could clip. If he had a pair of scissors

he would clip the umbilical cord and cut himself loose but he can't. He can't and he sees the face and hears the voice and remembers the little things? He can't. And so, we, he has a desolation. Desolation requires loneliness.

Then, there are perplexities and the uncertainties and the confusion and the fear that we're not pleasing God in all this and then sin. David said here four times; I think that he said about sin and he prayed to God to deliver him from his sin. He said, O God, don't remember my boyhood, my youth when I was wild and did these things. Remember not the sins of my youth nor my transgressions. According to thy mercy, remember me O God. For Thy goodness sake. His sin bothered him. David knew whatever an instructed person ought to know. That the only real enemy in the world is your sin. That's the only real enemy. As long as you can lock the door on sin and will lock it out, you haven't an enemy that you need to worry about it. Hell or earth, nothing can separate you from the love of God. It's only sin that's your enemy. And when sin gives the key to the enemy, in comes the invader and takes over, then it's too bad for you.

Then there's distress and heartache and grief and sorrow and loss of communion and loss of fruit and loss of joy. Sin does this. Let's be sure there's no sin any place, because sin weakened David and almost destroyed his confidence here in this Psalm and gave to his enemies their only real power. Because I repeat, the only real danger is within. If you keep anything outside, you're alright. As soon as it gets inside, trouble starts.

And so, David began to destroy the enemy within. The only enemy really that he had, really, sin. So, he prayed and confessed and he admitted and he trusted God and he pleaded and he forced it on God. But, he made God listen. And he didn't grab at every hope that everything was all right. He insisted on knowing it. He wanted God to deliver him completely. So, David began to hope in God. Verse six, remember O Lord, Thy tender mercies and Thy loving kindnesses.

I read a passage in a version, I forgot what version it was. I have just rearranged my books up here and I have translations that go clear across a bookcase and leak down over the other side, four or five of them and I don't always remember which translation it was. But one of them said, O God, Thou art loyal to me. And immediately I got on my knees and thanked God He's loyal. God is loyal to His people. The loyalty of love and the loyalty of wisdom. He's loyal, and David knew it. And so David trusted God and say, Lord, you're loyal. Your faithfulness and your tender mercies have been ever of old. Good and upright is the Lord. Verse nine, the meek, He will guide in judgment the meek. He will teach his way. Verse fourteen, the secret of the Lord is within the fearing. And verse fifteen, He shall pluck my feet out of the net. That's one thing we didn't remember, a net, a booby trap. They had set booby traps for David. And David said, I can't see the booby traps. I don't know where they are. And you know how David escaped them. He escaped them by not looking for them at all. He escaped them by looking to the Lord. And as he looked to the Lord, the Lord plucked his feet out of the net and he didn't get into any booby traps.

A lot of you, dear people, you're developing myopia of the soul. You're always afraid. People are always calling me or writing me or coming to see me and there's always some little pimple on the body. And they forget all about the cancer in the soul. It's some little old thing, afraid of some booby trap. Can I do this? May I do that? What do you think I should do about this? Do you think I ought to take in a play? What do you think about the opera Mr. Tozer? What do you think about television? What do you think Mr. Tozer about baseball? Oh my, don't bother me about such things. Those aren't the things that matters sir. There's something bigger than that. If they should pull booby traps through you, the way to escape them is look straight to the Lord Jesus Christ, straight to Him, straight to Him. And as you see Jesus, He will lead

you out of the net, and you will escape the net.

So, here we have a man. We have a man living in the middle of life, a living man in a dead world, a good man in a bad world, a right man in a wrong world, a man of God in a world filled with men of flesh. And he was living in the middle of it. Living right in the middle of it, and thanking God in the middle of it, and fruitful and useful in the middle of it, serving his generation by the will of God. So, here was a living man believing and praying. After all, the old song "Trust and Obey" says it. He believed and he prayed. The devil can silence you so you can't pray anymore. That's one of the first things he has to do. When an enemy comes into a country, one of the first things he wants to do is to destroy communication. A burglar comes to your home, if he's a wise burglar, that is, wise in the ways of the devil, he cuts the telephone wires before he comes in. If he can break communication with help, the source of help, then you are an easy victim.

So, prayer is the source of communication between you and help. And if the devil can cut the wires and discourage you so you don't pray, you're an easy victim after that. In God's name, I beseech you, begin to pray. You've had a rough time of it. Maybe some of you have and I suppose I don't even know how rough it's been with you. You've been treated rough this last week. You've gone through hard things.

Well, if you've come through all right, then I say thank God and I wouldn't have had it otherwise. But if you're discouraged and your prayers are cut off, then woe be to you and watch out. You better get your communications established. You better get into God again. You say, I can't pray. I'm blue and gloomy and I have failed and I can't pray. Oh, you can say Abba. You can say that much can't you? If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And He gives forth the Spirit of His Son saying, Abba Father. And Abba, you know, is the Arabic, and one Arabic word for father and various other languages have it, Abba. And they tell me that Abba is a word you can speak without teeth. You can take your teeth out and still say, Abba. But if it was a difficult thing, you'd have to get your teeth in. But you can say Abba before you have any teeth. A little fellow I see back there now, I can see through the glass. Somebody's holding a little chap. He can't talk yet probably, but he can say Abba. And so we can say that. If you feel so little and hopeless and useless that you can't pray, if you can't pray like a Baptist deacon, pray like a newborn babe and say Abba. Keep saying that and God will hear your prayer and know what you mean.

I always think of Sidney Smith, that great English writer of several generations ago. He never knew what to do with punctuation-never. He was a brilliant writer, a stylist to perfection, but he never knew how to punctuate. So, he wrote a manuscript and then he wrote one page. And on that page, he put all the punctuation marks that were in the English language, and said, note, sprinkle these around where they'll do the most good. He didn't know where they belonged, but he hoped somebody did. And so, I say to you this morning, just tell God, O God, I don't know how to pray. I don't know what to say, but hear my heart and sprinkle it around where it'll do the most good. Make it fit where it ought to be. I'm too dumb. I don't even know how to pray God. Ah, God loves people like that. The meek He will guide in judgment. The meek He will teach His way. And if you will simply and meekly say, Abba Father, for Jesus sake, pretty soon you will get help from above, and then, the communications are established and everything's all right again.

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