

'Consider Your Ways'

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of considering our ways and reflecting on our souls, rather than neglecting them in favor of trivial pursuits.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 12:13, Isaiah 1:18, Haggai 1:5, Matthew 16:26, James 4:14

Topics: "Self-Reflection", "Spiritual Accountability"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and the need for individuals to consider their spiritual lives in his sermon 'Consider Your Ways.' He contrasts the reflective nature of humans with the instinctual behavior of animals, urging listeners to spend time contemplating their souls rather than trivial pursuits. Tozer highlights that God invites us to reason together, offering forgiveness and urging us to prioritize eternal matters over fleeting distractions. He warns against neglecting our souls and the responsibility we have to nurture them, reminding us that our lives are a precious loan from God. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a deep consideration of our ways and a commitment to seeking God earnestly.

Transcript

"Consider Your Ways"

June 9, 1957

I have two texts. They are found in Isaiah 1:18. First, the words of the Lord, come now and let us reason together saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land, but if you refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with a sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. I'm only concerned tonight with that opening word from God, come now and let us reason together. Then in Haggai, the first chapter. Haggai 1:5, and also the same is repeated in the seventh verse. Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, consider your ways. Consider your ways. Come, and let us reason together.

I want to reason with you a little bit tonight. And I'll start by saying that what you already know, that the difference, the chief difference anyway, between a man and an animal, is that man reflects, and the beast does not. A man and an animal, the man and the animal, they start out with about the same amount of data. And the same kind. When a new puppy is born into the world, or a new calf, they have about the same data furnished to the senses. The sun is there, or it isn't there. It's a warm day or it's a cold day. Things are comfortable or they're not comfortable. The mother is near or she isn't. The data is about the

same. The senses tell the newborn calf, is about what they tell the newborn baby. So that, we begin just about where the beasts begin.

And the Bible doesn't hesitate to say that man and beast are very much alike. It also says that there's a gulf fixed between them, the difference it's so vast that it can never be explained. But it also says that there is a certain likeness there. But the chief difference will begin to manifest itself very early. For the man reflects and the beast does not. The calf born on the range or in the barn, lives by its instincts. And it can grow to be old and die of old age if they're permitted to do it, and still, it will be living by its instincts. It will have learned very little, and what it learns, will be very low grade and require practically no cogitation.

But a child of three years old is already a walking question mark. You know that. The child reflects and the beast does not. The man can reflect and the beast apparently cannot. Both are hurried into the world, as the Poet has said, hurried hither without asking. Nobody asks to be born. No animal asks to be born. But after they are born, the man begins to ask questions and the animal never does. This is the difference. The farmer and the horse; there aren't many left but will for the sake of the argument invent a hypothetical horse, put him out at the head of a plow and start him through the field. And as you go by, you will find that they are a good deal alike, the tired, dusty man and the tired, dusty horse.

But, there is a difference that is as vast as the difference that separates heaven from hell and the earth from the stars above. It is the difference in ability to consider our ways. No horse ever stops to consider his ways. The man often does. But even though we almost always at some time in our lives do consider, it is a tragic fact that after a while we stop it, and most people do not reflect on their own ways. They may reflect, but they do not reflect on their own ways. Do you know what I wish, and wishing is a word I don't use-much. It's only a carelessly used word. And to me, it simply means that it's a wild imagination that I can give nobody to. But do you know what I wish? I wish that I could get the men of the city of Chicago and environs, or of St. Louis, or of Milwaukee, or of New York or Brooklyn, or Pittsburgh or Cleveland or Detroit or Cincinnati. I wish that I could get the males above the age of eight, and under the age of 100, just one week to give as much consideration to their own souls as they give to the standings of their particular teams, and I have named the cities that have the teams, to their own ball clubs.

Now, I just wish it. I wish that as many people today, as many men today in the city of Chicago had spent, say, there was a doubleheader today, that would take about how many hours, about four hours? I wish and I could pray, that we could get as many, I don't know how many were there. I know they were there. But I suppose maybe, there were 35,000; I would guess that. And if we could get 35,000 people to spend four hours considering their souls, and their lives and their futures with the concentrated attention that they considered the strike outs and the stolen bases and the rest. Now I don't mean there's anything wrong with strikeouts and stolen bases. This isn't an attack on Billy Pierce, or whoever pitched today. This is merely saying that as soon as a three year old asked basic questions, but a thirty year old is long past that. The three year old says, Mother, where did I come from? You came from God. How did I get here? Well Jesus sent you. Is there a God Momma, and can God see me? And if I'm in a room with no doors or windows, one little chap actually asked, could God see through and see me?

Well, those are basic questions, but who was going to win the pennant? That's not a basic question. And yet people for at least four hours today, listened, or watched and listened to men playing a game of arbitrary, that is, the thing was arbitrary. Did you ever stop to think of the foolish, arbitrary quality of the game. Now, this doesn't mean I'm attacking it. It's relaxing I suppose. But, did you ever stop to think that a fellow throws a ball that has been made for him to throw, at with great pains it's made for him to throw, and

he has neglected his soul, and neglected God, and neglected heaven in order that he might get skill enough to throw that thing, in a strike zone, at least three times before he threw it out of the strike zone four times. Now, who said three and four?

Somebody, Abner Doubleday they say invented that gadget. But brother, did you ever stop to think it's, it's arbitrary and whimsical. You can say a man's out on four strikes, and just as easy, and where is there any law in the universe that says three strikes and you're out? That's invented. And furthermore, what happens to that ball? There's a little, artificial spheroid that is flying through space. And oh, we'll get 60 miles an hour. That's a guess, a rough guess. And somebody will hit it. And 35,000 people are screaming themselves hoarse about that. Now, what's the difference where it goes? It could fall down a gopher hole. It could get lost under a board or plank someplace. It could go over onto the street and fall into the sewer, or Mickey Mantle could catch it. What's the difference my brethren. You see, don't you? Now this isn't, I repeat for the third time to say that there's anything wrong with it. But the point is, it's arbitrary and nothing is settled when they've settled it. Nothing is settled. You say, well, he got him out, but got him out. What does that settle? That's an arbitrary expression that doesn't have any root in nature anywhere. And so of all games, and so with most of man's activities.

I saw today in the restaurant a rather intelligent looking woman. Brother McAfee and I ate after the broadcast and I saw a rather intelligent looking woman sitting there, and she was the very essence of concentration, serious face and sober with a pencil in her hand neglecting her friends around her conversation that died. What do you suppose she was doing? I'll give you three guesses. Yes, sir. You've got it. She was working a crossword puzzle. Now, what is she accomplishing I'd ask you? Nothing, nothing at all. It's the same with card games and the same with almost everything we do.

I heard old Gus Johnson, a great Swedish preacher from the Twin Cities, Gus Johnson. I heard him years ago with sort of a dry, wry sense of humor, saying that he was out on the golf course with his son. He never played but he was out there that day and his son was above on it. Then he said he started to talk and his Son said, shoosh, shoosh, Dad, don't speak. He said, what did he care about putting. He said he wanted to talk. He didn't care about putting. Well brother, now all this is arbitrary and I suppose it's relaxing, and if you don't die of a nervous breakdown and sue, then your outlook may not be quite as large and all embracing as it would have been if you hadn't putted. I don't know though whether they increase them or make them smaller, but we'll ignore that.

But man spends this magnificent intellect that God's given him. This, this brilliant thing that can flash out like silver streams of light. And you can reach back and take hold of the history and pull it up too, and you can reach out into the future and pull it back, and can examine stars and moons and satellites and the depths of the earth and the deeps of the sea and hold them before him. He's got all that. You've got all of that. How long since you've used it?

And think now of this imagination, this ability to consider that we have. God says, consider your ways. Come now, let us reason together. God is calling us to this my brethren. And He's saying this to men who won't have long to live. They won't be here very long. They won't be around very long. I won't. You won't. You say, it's all right to say you won't, but I'll be. You may be a little longer, maybe not as long. But what is a few years against the solemn space we call eternity. What is it amount to anyway? What's the difference? Look, back in the days of Caesar or on the days of Hotep, the educator of Egypt before Caesar's day. One man died at twenty. One died at thirty. Once died at seventy and one died at ninety. There they were, separated by a spread of seventy years, and yet I ask you if it really matters now, who

died at twenty and who died at fifty and who died at seventy and who died at ninety? No. What's the matter of fifty years set against 5,000 years, and set against eternity.

And so, with that backdrop against that backdrop of eternal years, God says to us, consider. Here, I've given you, I've given you something to consider, consider it makes no difference who won today. It makes no difference whether he sunk that putt or not. It makes no difference. Think on something eternal. Think about something that matters. Give a little time to something that matters. And I believe that the great God of justice and wisdom and logic and common sense in the heavens, giving to man as He does give to man such an amazing power to reflect.

I believe that that God expects that man to reflect, and if he will not do it, and if he will spend hours and hours day after day and week after week, thinking about things that don't matter and neglect the one thing that does, I see no place where God is any under any obligation to take that man to heaven. God puts a door there and doesn't hide it. God puts a door there and the very stars in their courses tell where it is. God puts a door there leading into the Kingdom and God calls and He waits early and He stretches His hands out and He says, come, come, come. And He calls and He invites and exhorts and He urges in a thousands ways and keeps it up for a lifetime. And yet if a man chooses to ignore that call and refuses to see that door, I want to ask you by what moral logic is God required to pick the man up by the scruff of his neck and take him to heaven, when he spent a lifetime fooling with things that don't matter; and refuse to consider the one thing that does.

God says, consider your ways, and come now and let us reason together. And it's a deep wrong a man commits, a deep wrong you'll commit tonight against your own soul if you sit there and taste a sermon and judge about whether it was as good as the one you heard this morning or the one I preached sometime before or somebody else preached. What a terrible thought, with the judgment coming in your life heading away that we should taste and compare instead of do something about it. The deep wrong we do our own souls to vegetate like irrational creatures. Or to spend our God-given faculties that were made to engage not stars and planets, but angels and seraphim and God Himself. I say we do a terrible wrong against our own souls when we use such faculties as we have to fool and play and neglect our souls. For what is your life James asked, what is your life? You possess the most precious thing in the world?

I was out in the country the other day with Brother Ty, Brother Olson and McAfee. And who else? Rex? We ought not to forget him. We were out there and we saw 100 Hereford steers being fattened for the market. Great, fine looking fellows they were, I guess they weighed 650 pounds. A man said he thought they would average 800. Well, they had everything apparently. But they lacked one thing. They lacked that which the poorest man in Chicago has. The skid row bum that lies tonight in a stupor on Madison Street has what the finest blooded steer doesn't have. He has a soul. He has a life given from God. He has that which will have no termination, but will be on and on and on. What is your life? You possess it. And it's the most precious thing in all the world, for it gives meaning to everything else. It's the loan of God to you. I don't know how God makes souls, but I know God lends them to us. It's a loan of God.

And when the little new baby squalls his protest to the round world, his mother cuddles him warm against her breast. God has lent him a soul. And God says to that little one later when he can understand it, consider thy ways. Come now, let us reason together. Though your sins be scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. And God does not expect that one to whom He has lent a soul to act like one to whom He has not lent a soul for you cannot use the personal human pronoun "one" about an animal. God doesn't expect us or expect that animal, however blooded and however fine to respond, because there's nothing there to

respond, but God has given us a soul.

And though I were to suffer and have to suffer the pains of the damned for 1000 years, I wouldn't give up that which I know to be my soul. My soul, that in me that is likest to God of anything in the universe. I wouldn't give it up. I wouldn't give it up. And no purgatory where a soul in a man must roast or boil or broil in some purgatory for 1000 years. I say he's fortunate and lucky and ought to thank God in the fire, that he still has his soul. I don't believe in purgatory but I say if it even if it were, I would still say a man is lucky to have a soul.

What potentialities, what bounded possibilities, God has given to the man with a soul. You know, young people, you have a soul. Some dear young people, God bless them these days, don't know they have anything but glands. They live on their glands, they run on their glands. Yes, you have a set of glands alright, and God gave them to you and you oughten to be ashamed of them. But in addition to having glands you have a soul. To think how many millions tonight in this great favored land of ours who don't know they have anything but glands. They live, they live by their glands and their nerves. And whoever can stir the glands of the greatest number of people can make a million dollars a year. Elvis is doing it. And Elvis has never stirred anything but the glands of the people, the feeble minded, the oversexed, the old and disappointed, and those who have forgotten that they have a brain in their head.

Now, this life that God's given us, this soul is what you make it. Come and consider, think a little about it. Consider your ways. Think of that soul of yours. God won't accept the responsibility for making it, any more than what it is now, because God gave it to you with potentialities. It's as though I were to take twenty pounds of the finest clay to a potter and commission him to make me a vase. I wouldn't be responsible for anything but the plan. I would say, I want the vase to be so high, so large. I want it to be decorated this way and I want it to be painted and varnished and burnt and painted and varnished and burnt again. I could give him the instructions of what I wanted. But if I came back and found a cheap pot all askew, lumpy and hopeless, I wouldn't be responsible because I had furnished the finest clay and I had laid the plan and I had given the commission. And the potter who couldn't come through deserves no pay.

God has put in your hands that which is finer than the finest clay. God has given you a soul. Think what men have done with their souls. We were just looking, Brother Chase and I tonight and Mc Afee, looking at a book up in the study by Bernard of Clairvaux. Why, there's music even in the words, actually you can sing it Bernard of Clairvaux, beautiful, beautiful. He's the man who wrote, Jesus The very thought of the with sweetness fills my breast but sweeter far thy face to see and in thy presence rest. Bernard of Clairvaux, his soul wasn't of any finer clay than yours or mine using an illustration for certainly the soul is not made of clay. And the body is made of the clay.

But the soul that God put in Bernard of Clairvaux is no finer than the soul he put in you or me or Al Capone. And God isn't responsible, if with the life and intelligence in the Word of God before us and the pleading of the Holy Ghost, we do nothing about it. You can't blame heredity. Blaming heredity when Esau and Jacob were brothers. You can't blame environment. When one shall be taken and the other left. Two shall be sleeping in one bed. Two shall be plowing in the field, that's environment. If environment made the soul then there would be no distinction. The two shall be sleeping in one bed one shall be taken on the other left. Maybe they're brothers or sisters who slept together from the time they were born. Maybe there are two brothers or a father and son plowing there in the field, one shall be taken and the other left.

So, what happens to your soul You can't blame on heredity and you can't blame it on environment. And if you're so infinitely, shoddily cheap as to blame it on your parents, and the way you were treated at home. I haven't any any sympathy nor any message, I'm afraid. He says I had to go to school, and I didn't have very good clothes. And so I felt ashamed, and I got an inferiority complex. And my parents were very religious, and they took me to church and made me go to Sunday school and I had holes in my shoes. And that turned me against religion. And that's why I'm not a Christian. Oh, my brother. What a mousy attitude that is to take. What a cheap attitude. What an excuse. And the thinnest thing in the world is an excuse. And the only thing smaller than an excuse is a man who try to hide behind it.

And so we blame our parents, or our heredity, or our environment. When Esau and Jacob had the same parents and one was loved of God, and the other driven from God's presence, when one shall be taken and the other left at the coming of Christ. So what is your response? Think about it a little won't you? Think about it, young people. You can't live forever on thrills. You can't live on the uprushing of your glands. You can't live on parties. You can live on long protracted telephone conversations and witticisms and funny remarks. Think on your ways. Consider your ways. Come let us reason together. God sent His Son with power to save from death and darkness in the grave. And He calls you tonight and says consider and think on your ways.

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