

'Cooperating With God in Our Spiritual Lives'

by A.W. Tozer

Making progress in our spiritual lives means to have a great seriousness about God and Christ, a great hunger for God, and a new zeal for personal righteousness.

Scripture: Isaiah 30:18

Topics: "Unity in the Church", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the necessity of cooperating with God in our spiritual lives, urging believers to take their faith seriously and to cultivate a deep hunger for God. He highlights the importance of progress in personal righteousness and the need for unity among believers, stressing that spiritual growth requires intentional effort and adherence to God's commandments. Tozer encourages the congregation to read Scripture daily and to engage in private prayer as essential means of nurturing their spiritual lives. He warns against complacency and mediocrity, calling for a renewed zeal for righteousness and a serious approach to faith. The sermon concludes with a promise of further teachings on practical steps to achieve spiritual growth.

Transcript

Cooperating with God in our Spiritual Lives

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer

October 30, 1955

I want to read a passage that I read and preached from at council during the Second World War in New York. It will not be the same sermon, but it'll be the same text at least the same passage of Scripture. In the 30th chapter of Isaiah beginning with verse 18: Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you. And therefore, will He be exalted that He may have mercy upon you. For the Lord is a God of judgment. Blessed are all they that wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem. Thou shalt weep no more. He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry. When He shall hear it, He will answer thee. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner anymore, but thine eyes shall see thy teacher. And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, this is the way, walk ye in it. When you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left.

And then, with the verse 26, moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound. Behold, the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy: his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire: And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err. Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty One of Israel. And the Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones.

I think I skipped verse 25, if I did, let me read it, there shall be upon every high mountain, upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters in the day of the great slaughter and the towers fall. Now, that's a section from the 30th chapter of Isaiah. And there is a verse in Deuteronomy 5:29, O that there were such a heart in them that they would fear me and keep all My commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children forever.

Now, those who attend this church know that while we have a sense of humor, we do not approach the things of God in anything but a serious vein. That we are in dead earnest about the service of God; in dead earnest about what the Bible has to say. In dead serious, earnest about our responsibility to God, the fact that we're getting along. That time, like an ever-rolling stream is bearing all its sons away. That the world is growing old and the judgment is growing near. And this church, if it must be alone, this church is having no part in the fun and fanfare and noise and pleasure and carnal delights. We are serious-minded men and women. And we take God seriously. So, I want to talk about this and about progress in our spiritual lives and in the life of the church.

Now somebody will say, there goes Mr. Tozer again. He apparently has a feeling that we're not where we should be, and that there is progress. Our friend Ed Maxey, gave a talk somewhere here in the city. I'm not saying where here a few weeks ago. And there was an old deacon there. And the old deacon came around to him afterwards and said, my brother, the apostle Paul couldn't live the way you preach. You are setting the standards too high, which you deacons forgive me for saying it's typical of deacons. I don't know why that should be, but it's typical of deacons. Not of the deacons of this church, maybe, but it's typical. They don't want anybody to disturb their dead level of mediocrity. They want to be what they are, clear their throat, solemnly lead in prayer extensively on a Sunday morning and not be bothered any or have anybody disturbed the pattern of their lives.

Now, I believe that there must be somebody behind this if we're going to make any time. I remember hearing about a preacher who was something of a crusader in his day. And he liked to get out and get into the newspapers and was somewhat a little sensational and something of a crusader; and was attacking the wrongs in the city in politics and in society. And somebody took him aside and said, my brother, I admire your zeal and all, but aren't you a little bit unscriptural in taking out after the devil the way you do? Does not the Bible say that the wicked flees when no man pursues him? And he said, yes, I read that verse, but I've always thought he'd make better time if somebody got out after him. He flees when nobody's after him, but he'll speed it up when somebody gets after him.

And so in the church of Christ, I suppose there is something natural and normal. Take a little baby. And that baby will grow if it's neglected. It'll grow if it is just fed. It'll grow. It'll grow even if it's covered with rash

and neglected. It'll grow. But it'll do a much nicer job if it has the tender care of its parents. And so a church will grow if you have the seed of God in your heart and the root of the matter is in you. You will make some kind of growth, I suppose. It's biological necessity that we grow. It's in us to do it. But we'll do it with a great deal more precision and correctness if we have somebody to help us along. So, in the moral life and the spiritual life, I suppose we'll make some progress. Some don't, but most do. And yet I think that if we would listen to the exhortations and even sometimes to rebukes of men God has sent, we'll make a great deal better time.

Now, when I say progress, progress in my life, progress in yours and in our church, what do I mean? Do I have some wild, weird, insubstantial, fanatical idea in mind? No, I think not. I mean that there should come upon people a great seriousness. I think you know me well enough to know that I am not a man without a sense of humor. In fact, I've had to fight a sense of humor all my life. It has been my biggest hindrance in the pulpit next to my pride. It has been my biggest problem as to how to keep from being funny.

And at home, I am somewhat of a mess, I think. And my sons and daughter know that I can be a tease. But my brethren, before the Holy Throne of God and in the church of God when the believers are assembled to talk about God and Christ and the blood and the future and judgment to come, there's no place for anything but dead seriousness. And I believe that a dead seriousness ought to be upon the people of God. I believe that we ought to take this whole thing seriously and that never for a moment, should there be anything but gravity when we think about God and Christ. And I'm preaching to Christian people ostensibly now and I therefore make no apology. And when I say that we ought to make progress, I mean that we ought to make progress in seriousness.

And then, I believe that we ought to have a great hunger of God upon us, a great hunger of God. We will only move in the direction of our hunger. You can be certain of that. Everything moves in the direction of its hungers. The sunflower that rises when the sun rises in the morning will turn its broad, yellow face to the sun and will follow the sun all day long and gaze on the setting sun with the same devotion that it gave when that sun rose in the east in the morning. And so, with a potato that is put in a basement. It will by Spring, that was put there in the Fall, climb for the light and begin to push out those brittle, juicy, long, little rootlet affairs. Not a root really, but a stock, and it will climb up to the side of the wall and climb to the light and if it could get through, climb out into the sunshine. The very potato in the basement has a hunger and it will move in the direction of its hunger. And so, it is with everything my friends. You will move in the direction of your hunger.

Some young men get married and establish a home and go in deep for a house. And they figure they've got to make a lot of money and I sympathize. It costs 10 times too much to live these days. And I'm certainly sympathetic with every effort of every young man to establish a good home for his family. But if that young man allows money to become his hunger, he will move in the direction of his hunger. Just as sure as he lives, he will move in the direction of his hunger. And the very little newborn creatures, the very newborn calf will stagger to its feet and put its legs all out in four directions and prop itself up and stagger toward the soft, fragrant side of its mother. He moves in the direction of its hunger. And the birds move in the direction of their hunger. Everything does. And it's not otherwise in the kingdom of God. We move in the direction of our hungers. And when you will become God hungry, you will move in the direction of God and the direction of of spiritual things and eternal things.

I think that if God were to be unkind enough or kind enough, whichever way you view it, to take away the veil of unseen and show us briefly how much we have that's perishing and how little we have that can't

perish, there would be weeping in this congregation. I believe that if we knew how much that we have is perishing who, who loves any better than I to hold in his hands a tiny little, warm, soft, fragrant baby and yet give that baby a few years and go up through the swift cycle to womanhood or manhood and then go down the other side. And those who helped bring it up to the pike will have long gone when it starts down. Everything parishes, homes parish, cars parish, jobs perish, our children leave us and go. And all that we have set our affections upon that has the stamp of mortality upon it. The stamp of mortality, it all dies. Change and decay and all around I see, O Thou who changes not abide with me.

I hope you're all going to have a good dinner. I know we're going to have it. We're going to have our little grandchildren with us. And we're going to have a good dinner and I hope you'll have a good dinner. But my friends, remember this. If God should suddenly show some of you how little you have that can't perish, you wouldn't eat a bite. You couldn't. You would be a miserable distressed person if you walked around and said everything I have is made a celluloid. Made of celluloid, a spark of fire and it will go in a quick blaze and leave me with nothing but gray ashes. O my God, how that moves me. How little I have behind me. How little I have that can last. Now, much that I have given my life to has perished before me and died and gone. And how little there is that is left that can't perish, gold and silver and precious stones that can abide the fire.

Now my brethren, the most important thing is that we should have a great hunger for God upon us and a great seriousness and a great gravity and a great longing for everlastingness. And then, am I all out of place and fanatical when I say, that when I talk about progress, I mean a new zeal after personal righteousness. Are you as good as you want to be? Are you in there where you feel you've arrived and say, thank you, thank you. I accept congratulations for my spiritual growth and my high acquisition in the kingdom of God. Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. Are you in that place where you're receiving congratulations from the devil for you are spiritual, or is there a hunger to be better person than you are?

I tell you friends; God will go a long way with a man however many faults he has and however he might be criticized justly for his blemishes. God will go a long way with that man if he knows he's hungering after righteousness. If God knows that in the heart of a man or woman there is an honest hunger to have to be a better man, God will go a long way with that man. It is when we arrive and start taking bows. And we feel worse with where we ought to be and want to be let alone and say, why doesn't the fella talk about something else? Why does he want to stir me to be a better man? Well, when we arrive at that place of course, too bad. But I don't think many of us have. And I don't think you think I'm fanatical or off the track when I say that we ought to have a new zeal for personal righteousness, that we ought to be better men than we are. Occasionally I get attacked and torn apart.

Recently, a brother told me about a little attack that's been made against me in one of my books; that I'm sarcastic in a lot of things, and I may be it. But brethren, I don't mind those attacks for one thing, for one reason, they drive me to God to search my own heart and say, God, please take out of me that which may offend my brethren. Take out to me that quality in my character that makes other people raise the eyebrow and say that fellow claims he's a Christian and look at the way he acts and talks. I want to be a better man than I am. And if any of you have arrived, God have mercy on your poor, dead soul.

The progress in the Christian life is a constant, a constant progress. We're always moving up. I mean the Christian life is a constant progress. And if there's no progress, there's no Christian life. Paul did not say I have finished my course until he heard the fellow outside wetting a sword. He heard, a wing a wang, a wing a wang. Some fellow had a stone and a sword and he was making that sword sharp and then pulling

out a hair and like my father used to do with his razor to see if that was sharp enough or not. And when the sword was ready for the neck of the man of God, he stopped progressing. He said, I have arrived. Thank God I've arrived. I'm now ready to die and lay down my life. I have finished my course. I've kept the faith and I'm now ready to be offered, and God the righteous judge has a reward for me. Now, I don't mean that that ended his spiritual progress forever, but I mean that his earthly progress had reached its climax with a whistling sword of the persecutor. And if the man of God, Paul never quite was satisfied with his spiritual life, why should you and I be?

My brethren, it isn't that I can say, I've arrived. Everybody that's arrived stand up. No, no, that's not the point. But it's that we are marching, we're moving, we're on the way, we're going there. We have the life before us and the star that shown over Israel shines over us today and we move in that direction. I don't want to know how fast the army is traveling. I want to know what direction it's traveling and I want to know that it's traveling. So, I'm urging you to this.

And then a new unity of heart among all the people who God. I believe in oneness, oneness. I don't believe in the oneness that takes in the evil along with good. We talk about these United States of America. But when we use the word united, we mean that there is a union of like mindedness, a union of Republican and Democratic ideas. A union of free ideas, and that our union lies in that which is good. But the moment that we introduce or allow to be introduced anything subversive or destructive of those ideas that holds us together, it's no longer unity, it's asininity.

And when we talk about the union of the churches, we mean the union of those who believe in God the Father Almighty and Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord, and in the Holy Ghost, and in the communion of saints and the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting and the resurrection of the body and the ancient holy faith of our fathers. But it does not mean that I reach out and draw into that union beliefs and ideas and doctrines and notions that would like a torpedo blow me up and sink me, and blow up the church of Christ and sink it. But within every church and among all the churches where God is loved and Christ is believed in, there must be unity; unity of heart whether they go along with us or not, unity of heart in all the sons of God.

Two little boys came selling Christmas cards to our house last week, and my wife wasn't there. So, I went down and talked with him. They came clear into the dining room with two huge bags full of Christmas cards. One of them was a pronounced brunette and the other one a pronounced blonde. And I said, are you two fellows brothers? They grinned and said they were brothers.

Well now, here was one, a blue-eyed pronounced blonde and the other fellow a dark, dark haired, brunette, and yet they were brothers. One may be a year older than the other; out making themselves a little Christmas money selling cards. God bless the boys. They told me they were of Catholic parents, but they were selling nice cards. Well, we bought some cards. But you know what? They were brothers. The same father, same mother, same home, same environment, same food and probably the same bed for they were about big enough. And yet, one was pronounced blonde and the other equally pronounced brunette. Now, in the kingdom of God, all God's people don't look alike. All God's children got shoes and all God's children have got a robe and all of God's children have a father, but they don't all look alike. I leave a room for variation.

And maybe I told you this, but a gentleman who is a university professor, Northwestern University, incidentally, wrote me a very lovely letter. He said he criticized me in public and his conscience was

bothering him and would I please forgive him. And I wrote him back and told him that I didn't feel bad about that. I didn't know about it, but beside that, I was harder on people than he was and so let's just forget. But I said there are so many areas where we can agree, so let's agree and shake hands and be friends. And I'd like to meet you, a gracious man like you that would write and apologize for criticizing me in public.

Well, brother, that man and I see not together on a certain matter of about what you criticize me. We don't see together on that, but I feel warm in my heart for that man though I've never met him to my knowledge. But I feel warm in my heart. A man who has a tender conscience and a loving Christian spirit that will make you want to apologize for saying what he considered an unkind thing about a brother in Christ. Even though he disagrees with me, he's my brother, whether he knows it or not. And he does know it. That man knows it.

So, unity, unity, unit, that's what we need. And we need not the unity of the cemetery; for the most unified and perfectly ordered institution in the whole world is a cemetery. And the least orderly is a kindergarten. The most orderly thing is the cemetery because everybody in it is dead. But in the kindergarten, there's not so much order, but there's a lot of growth and vitality.

And so, in a church where there's growth and vitality, you can expect that some people will be rubbed the wrong way and some people will be criticized. They blame Billy Sunday for rubbing the cat the wrong way. And he said, let the old cat turn around. He wasn't going to rub it any other direction than the one that he was rubbing. And so, there's a lot of rubbing the wrong way and occasional sparks, of course there will be. But there was in Jesus' day among his very disciples. There was in the book of Acts among the very ones who were baptized with the Holy Ghost at Pentecost. But at the same time, there's a unity that's deeper than those surface things. So, we want a unity, a great unity of worship, a great unity of devotion, great unity of love and prayer and purpose. We want that and we want a new charity for each other and new concern for the church and for perishing souls.

Now, how are we going to get this? I haven't much time left. But we've got to go along with God in getting it. I know I told you years ago about what John Wesley said a fanatic was. John Wesley says a fanatic is one who seeks desired ends, but ignores the constituted means of obtaining it. That's a fanatic. A man who wants to reach certain ends, but pays no attention to the means. He's just going to blunder toward it somehow. Like a boy to stand out on the hill and reach for the moon; he wanted it, but he ignored the desired end. Maybe in another 100 years they'll be going up with rockets. And then if he's around he can go. But you can't get up and pull it down that way. And so, some of our spiritual longings are the results, or at least all we do about it ever is too long. We don't use the constituted means. But my brethren, God has laid down certain rules and said, O that ye had a heart to obey my word and do my commandments, then you would prosper and then all your children would prosper.

Now we follow certain appointed means, constituted means to quote Wesley exactly, and by following these that God has pointed out plainly for us. And where are they pointed out? They're pointed out specifically in the Scriptures. And they're pointed out by the example of the early church and by the experience of the saints down through the years and by the plain indications of reason. And there isn't anything I ever tell you contrary to reason. And never at any time, when I try to make you see there's chariots and horses camped around about and chariots and horses of fire around the province of God. Everything can be brought to the sharp criticism of reason. And plain reason, tells us that these things are right. And by setting our hearts to do them and obey the Word and do the things God tells us to, counting

upon God to enable us, we can reach the goal.

Now I'm going to give you two points that I want you to consider very seriously and then I will give you some more and finish my talk next Sunday, where God is offering us seven times, the night will be seven times brighter than it was, seven times as bright. The moon will be like the sun seven times as bright in the great day when the towers fall. One point is and I want you to take these down: read with meditation a generous portion of Scripture every day to feed and nourish your heart. People come to me from all over to get counsel and instruction and prayer. And I counseled and pray with people until I'm exhausted sometimes.

And it all comes down to this one thing. You don't need me. You don't need my counsel. Go down to these companies and buy yourself a dollar and a half Bible and read your Bible and obey God, then you'll get along without counsel. We don't need psychiatrists and pastoral counsel so much as we need to read the Word of God. Read a little of it every day, meditate on it, a generous portion of it. It will feed you and nourish you and give you faith and instruct you. How can you hope to be prepared for heaven, when all the reading you have to do is preparing you for earth? How can you hope to be ready to die when all the reading you do is good only while you live? No, no, meditate on a generous portion of Scripture.

Sometimes when people come to me, I say all right now I find out where they are in their spiritual progress and I say, now here, I want to tell you something. Go to the book of Psalms and read it on your knees every day. Read a Psalm. Meditate on it. Ask God to help you. Ask God to give you light every day when you read some of the Psalms. A new spiritual experience will come into your life on that Book of Psalms, just alone in the book of Psalms to say nothing of all the other great books of the Bible. And then when you read this book, it'll crowd out some other things that you ought not to be reading for you're wasting your time on.

So read this book and you will be delighted with the result. I'm positive of it. It will not lead you into any false paths. It will not lead you to any ideals an apostle couldn't keep. It will not make a fanatic out of you. It will deliver you from fanaticism. For fanaticism means, according to Webster's definition, that I am hoping for a crown in heaven and doing nothing on earth to obtain it. And I'm singing about the crown that I shall wear and I'm not doing anything toward getting a crown. That's fanaticism, brethren, not the man who spends an hour on his knees with his open Bible. He's not the fanatic. He's the fanatic who comes to church and sings about the starry crown he's going to wear. And he hasn't read a book of the Bible for 20 years and he hasn't prayed an hour for God knows how long. He isn't living. He isn't taking constituted means. He isn't laying hold of the means God has put in his hands. God says, O that thou had such a heart in thee that thou would obey my commandments and walk according to my word. Then should you be prosperous and your children prosperous after you.

So, I say read with meditation, and this is last. Make time for private prayer. Find a way to do it somehow or other. Find a way to do it. You say, well, I can't pray. I don't have the time. I dash out in the morning and I grab the train. I don't have time to pray. My brother, how can you expect to grow in grace if you don't take the means toward that growth? You ought to pray every day. You want to learn that habit of praying every day. And you ought to wait on God every day. I recommend this to you in the morning instead of the Tribune. I recommend that your hymnbook sits beside you off to the left. Your wife won't mind that. Look at a hymn.

The other morning, I got up early, and my wife hadn't been well and so I got up and got my breakfast. And here I ran on: when morning guilds the sky my heart awaking cries, let Jesus Christ be praised. And I've been singing it ever since. And I said to myself, why should I ever read anything else in the morning except something like this. Let Jesus Christ be praised. In all our work and prayer, we ask his loving care.

Brethren, you can if you will, turn your shadowy day into the brightness of new if you will begin with the Bible and then you will make time for prayer. And you will memorize a hymn or two and begin to hum it in your heart as you go along. Now, don't do what the Moody student did. Ray and I were on a street car one time when they still had street cars on Halsted, and we heard somebody whistling gospel songs and he had a ventriloquist effect. We couldn't tell where he was. Finally, Ray hunted him up. He was a big, friendly Moody student. And he felt I guess that he wanted to have an evangelistic service. So, he was whistling gospel songs on the street cars. It's all right only I wouldn't do it, and I don't recommend you do it, although it's alright, if you want to do it you understand. I'm not condemning, I'm just saying that I wouldn't feel I would want to do it. I couldn't carry the tune that much anyhow.

But when I'm singing in my heart nobody knows when I'm flat. When I'm singing in my heart, nobody knows when I miss the tune. When I start, I say don't you like this hymn and I started one at home. And then there are some giggles, and I've got two tunes consumed and I'm singing one of one and another of the other. But I don't mind it because inside of my heart, nobody knows it. And I've got the words in God's hearing the song and I'm sure that it's just as good as Beverly Shea in the ears of God. Because it's the heart of a worshiping man singing in his poor way.

So, all right now, I've got some tougher stuff to say to you next week. I asked God to pray for you. I am going to preach at Keswick downtown and ask Ray to pray for you to God. I was going to preach at Keswick downtown here and Dr. Thomas, Dr. John Thomas of the St. Paul Union Church was just leaving. He said, I'm sorry, Mr. Tozer, I can't stay for the sermon but he said, knowing you, I've prayed for your congregation. He said, I know what you're going to do and he said good-naturedly and ducked out.

Brethren, next Sunday morning, if you can't take it don't come to church. Because I want to talk bluntly and frankly about some things that I think are going on among us that ought to stop and some new habits we ought to form and some older we ought to quit. And I'm preaching out of my own heart as brother Chase read to me this morning something some old preacher had written. I am not standing up saying here am I. I have kept the law. I've done righteousness. No, no, no, I'm a man that has by act and by spirit, broken all the commandments of God including the last one, to love my God and my brother.

But I have found my way to Calvary's bloodstained cross and been forgiven and cleansed and in meekness and humility. With the boldness of a prophet, I can tell you that there are some things we're going to have to do if we'll ever have the blessing of God on us as we should. And I want to continue and finish this sermon next Sunday morning. So, pray for me and come back. All right.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-tozer/cooperating-with-god-in-our-spiritual-lives/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net