

I Press Toward the Mark

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of pressing toward the high calling of God by overcoming personal barriers and embracing the fullness of atonement in Christ.

Duration: 38:55

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 22:37, Romans 5:20, 1 Corinthians 2:2, Ephesians 4:14, Philippians 3:14, 2 Timothy 4:7

Topics: "Pressing On"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of seeking God's presence and experiencing His power. He uses the analogy of a pilot assuring passengers that they will soon be in sunlight despite the current rainy weather. The preacher encourages listeners to trust in God's ability to bring them into His presence and to not be discouraged by obstacles or confusion. He also references the apostle Paul's words in Philippians 3:13-14, where Paul expresses his determination to press on towards the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. The preacher concludes by urging listeners to let go of past failures and focus on moving forward in their relationship with God.

Transcript

Now, again in this lecture I'm only going to read this verse 13 and 14. Brethren, brethren, says the Apostle, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press as of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Now, you know that he wrote this two years before he died.

He just had two years to go. And then at the end of the two years, or between the writing of this and his testimony, something had happened evidently, because the man of God said that here, that he knew, and that he had fought a good fight, and that he had kept the faith, and that he was now ready. Now, that something happened in those two years to the man of God.

Now, you have been listening to me over these last years. And again we ask, what is the pastor advocating? What is this that he preaches? I am concerned that it be nothing else but Christ, because anything anybody offers you, if not just more of Christ, is false. I am concerned that his doctrinal foundation would be the Scripture, and in its whole spiritual mood would be apostolic, and that it be in harmony with the best in literature, the best in humanity, and the best in biography.

And yet, why does this preaching sound different? Why does it sound strange when compared with the much so-called and true gospel preaching? Well, what is this, before I enter in really to the message for the night? But I wanted to tell you that about a general textualism captured the gospel church. By the gospel church, I mean the fundamentalists, the gospel church, those who believe in Christ the Savior and accept him as such. And the scribes and the lawyers took over, and set up a hierarchy in schools and Bible conferences in churches, and they all went, and the rule became a rigid adherence to words.

Now, it so happens that I believe, and have never believed anything else in my entire life, but in the plenary, that means verbal, inspiration of the Scriptures as originally given. And you'll be honest with me, there's no reason to quote me, quote this, that I believe, and have always believed, as a responsible Christian teacher, in the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Scriptures as originally given. But the thing was, and still is, that the, by school I don't mean in particular, the thought, the verbal inspiration, rigor mortis set into it.

And with the result that we were, we were, the religious imagination was sultified, the learning was choked down, the religious aspirations flapped down, and the longing aspirings of the children of God were clipped like a hen in a hen coop, and we were told to shut up and like what, this was it. Brethren, do you know what happened to this? The resulting, with the language of the New Testament persisting, and the spirit of the New Testament green, do you know what happened? Well, I'll tell you. There came about a revolt, a revolt against the two directions.

The masses of evangelicals revolted without knowing they were revolting. It was the gasping of a fish in a bowl where there's no oxygen. The masses revolted with entertainment, until the gospel churches are now camping on the doorsteps of, and then over against that and on the opposite side, some of the more intelligent fundamentalists revolted into evangelical rationalism, which is already built with liberalism.

And the result is that you just don't hear what the rest of the time is about. It sounds strange to hear anyone preaching as I preach, because on one side we have the masses saying, I've accepted Jesus, whoop-de-doop, let's go and have fun. And on the other side, serious revelers sinking their way perilously near to the borders of liberalism.

The New Testament message, objectives, and methods have been relied on it. And in the name of the lordship of Jesus, which is lordship in name only, we have produced our own message, our own objectives, and then have thought out our own methods, achieving those objectives which are in many cases not scriptural at all. Now, my brethren, is it heresy to yearn and pray and long after God? Is it heresy to constitute a radical mind, to yearn and pray in spite? Do you remember when I read the first night the great prayer in the cloud of unknowing? God, I beseech thee, show me the intent of mine heart, with the unspeakable gift of thy grace, that I may lovely and wordily praise thee.

To long perfectly to love God, to wordily to praise him, is a mean more than words when you say it, meaner everything. Is that heresy? Should they put a man in jail for it? Should he be ostracized in the light of our hymnody, in the light of our devotional books back to Paul, in the light of the prophecy of the saint? No, I think not. Now, I want to read to you just very briefly from Necepharis, from a book called the Philokalia.

He starts out, he wants to move forward to know God, to do what the cloud calls being one with God, united with God. Now, I want you Christians to ask yourselves the question, could I go along with this? Now, this Necepharis was a Greek. That is, he was over on the Greek side.

He wasn't a Protestant, and he wasn't a Roman Catholic, and he wasn't a Coptic, nor a Mexican. He belonged to over on the Greek side, but he was a saint to help people to go along with God. And he said, You who desire to capture the wonder and illumination of our Savior Jesus Christ, you believe in this, and you seek to feel the fire in your heart.

Now, here was a scholar and a saint, and he wrote it into a book in the, I think, which is a classic, and is recognized as such, and he dared to use the word, you seek to feel the divine part, and strive to sense and experience the feeling of reconciliation with God, who in order to unearth in the field of your heart, and to gain possession of it, have renounced everything worldly. You desire that this soul should burn brightly, even now, not in the future. We have become so distant-minded that we've pushed everything into the future, everything into the future.

But this man says, You who desire your soul to burn brightly, even now. And Peter said, In this present world, for this purpose have renounced all this world, who wish by conscious experience, conscious experience in modern psychology, to know and to receive the kingdom of heaven existing within you. He said what I'm teaching all the time, that Christ dwells in the heart of every believer.

Know ye not that Christ is in you, except you believe? And if a man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of you. And the riches of the Lord lie potentially there. But we have been forbidden to believe it, or forbidden to think.

We have been choked down, and the oxygen cut off, and our wings clipped, and our longings killed. And that's why, when I say it sounds different and strange, and people say, What is this new doctrine? It's an old doctrine. Ah, my brother, I want to talk a little bit tonight about the cloud of concealment that has made full atonement for us.

Let's start there. Christ has made full atonement. Christ has, for sin atonement, made a wonderful Savior.

Would you like to hear it said for you by somebody else that could say it better than this little lady, Julian? Here's what she said. The precious amends for satisfaction are for man's sin, turning all our blame into endless honor. Could it be said sweeter than that? The sins our Lord hath made for man's sin, turning all our blame into endless honor.

Say it a little differently. He said where grace abounded, sin does what? Oh, where sin abounded, where grace does much, turning all our blame into endless honor. Now, God's face is turned toward us.

Think like that tonight. Don't let the devil cheat you. Don't let doubt beset you.

Don't let anything I say or anybody has ever said cheat for his knowledge. But the face of God is turned toward you. And as a Christian, the smiling face of God toward you.

Why then do we not enjoy, now to use these words again, why then do we as Christians not wonder at the divine illumination of the Savior Jesus Christ? Why do we not feel the divine fire? Why do we not strive to sense and experience, or why do we not sense and experience, feel affiliation with God as well as the knowledge of it? And why do we not gain possession of it? Oh, I know they dismiss it by word, your position and your possession. But that can get so cold as dry ice. Why is it that the candles do not burn more brightly even now? Why is it that we do not have the conscious experience to leave the kingdom existing within us? Well, I'll tell you why.

Because there is the sweet smiling face of God without the clouded concealment. Now, my friends, there is never such when the sun doesn't shine. In some of the cities, I think it's Atlanta, Georgia, maybe I'm wrong, but one of the southern cities offers, have you heard it? That they will give all that rum, that day's rum to the newspaper, free of charge if the sun doesn't shine somewhere.

St. Petersburg? Well, now let me tell you something. That the sun shines every day and there never has been a day from the hour God said, let the sun rule the day. But there are dark days and misty days and cloudy days and days that get so dark you have to light, days that get so dark that in the country the chickens go to roost, I think.

Now, there are dark days and yet the shining just as brightly as on the brightest, clearest day in June. Why then does it not shine on the earth between the sun and the earth, the clouded concealment? The sun is all right, the sun is up there and brimming broadly and just as bright and just as hot as red in the desert. But he doesn't get through to the earth because there is a clouded concealment, this cloud, my brothers.

You know what it is from the standpoint of the weather. But what is it as applied to Christians? Why, what's the matter? Well, it's the cloud of concealment, the cloud that we allow to be over. What is this cloud? Atonement has been made, there's nothing to do for it's all been done.

Not a drop to be shed, not a spear needs to enter a holy heart, not a tear nor a groan nor a drop of sweat, not agony, death has no more dominion over him. It is done, it is finished, it is forever done. God shines down upon us.

And even upon Christians, there's that cloud or above cloud of concealment that puts thee in thy God, as the brothers say. Now what is that cloud? Well, it's a cloud in thing, it may be many things. There is the cloud of pride for ages.

You are your father's child, your home. And yet for a lifetime, you may go without the wondrous divine illumination of the Savior, without feeling the divine fire in your heart, or sensing or experiencing the healing of wretched God. And without the candles of your soul burning brighter, because you allow a cloud of pride over your head.

And the devil says, well, God hates you, God turned his back, the devil lies. There have been turns to a child of God and to a repentant sinner since the hour Jesus groaned and died and said, it seems to God he's turned all away. But we allow this cloud of pride and the cloud of stubbornness, that are just plain stubborn.

They will not bend, they will not kneel, neither to man or God, or to anybody, law and death, they will not. And so this cloud of stubbornness, God complained about Israel, it cracks, and the forehead is high, and he couldn't get them to kneel. And then there is self-will.

Now, self-will is a very religious thing. And it may become religious, get converted, and enter right with you into the church when you join, and bring you into the chamber when you pray. Self-will, and self-will you'll note, is good natured only when it's getting its own way.

And it's vouchsafed and ill-tempered when it is crossed. Think about that. Is your surrender to God sufficient? Yes.

So that you can be, to even swing your cross. And then there is ambition. And you know there's even religious ambition? People that are religiously ambitious for something perhaps that isn't in the will of God, or that's for self-aggrandism, and the result is that it's a cloud above them, between them and their God.

Now, there's a little proverb, a Knox translation, it reads like this, it rather amuses me, because it's so true, and it's a good picture of the human heart. It says, Crippled by, crippled, C-R-I-P-P-E-D, Crippled by his own, a man eats his heart out, finding fault even with God. And you'll find Christians like that.

Crippled, golly, they eat their heart out, finding fault even with God, having what God calls a controversy with me, and then, everything I claim for myself. Now this is the one thing I've been teaching, I suppose, at heart, that I've got to give up everything. That this pastor that I have here must go on the block, and I must be ready to give it up, and let it ride away on any sermon I preach, or any position I take.

I dare not, my job as editor of the weekly, my position in the religious world, I must put everything on the block, and ready to go. If I own it, it is a cloud over my head. It becomes a cloud of obscurity that nothing will penetrate.

When people try to pray through it, nothing can penetrate it. You try to fast through it, there are people that fast for days, out of nothing but stubborn. You know that, the history, I won't go into politics, but over the world in the last 25 years, you remember that there were some who died for political reasons, just sheer, downright stubborn.

And there are those who, you try to fast, you can't do it, brother. The cloud of concealment, if it is something that you say is yours, and you want to, but you don't, it'll put a veil over it. And if there's any sun, it'll not be very bright.

It'll be a cloud. Pray through it. This idea that if you pray long enough, everything will be all right.

Why, God got some people up off their knees and told them to quit. Two days later, they stopped praying. Did you know that? Said, no use.

There was a man, Saul, and he was praying and praying. God came, put his hand over his mouth, Saul, Samuel. Said, Samuel, don't pray anymore for Saul.

He's broke. Don't pray for him. Shut him up.

And there was another instance where Joshua was lying face down, praying. We'd have written a tract about him. We'd have said, oh, what a thing.

God says, well, she's lying there on your stomach. I don't honor a man for lying on his belly. Get up off your feet and deal with the crowd.

And then I'll bless you and save all that lying around groaning. So remember that this modern idea that if you pray, everything will be okay. It's not right, but the Saint of God loves these long seasons of prayer.

And God gives an answer to prayer. And the soul seeks his desire. And the breath of the Saint and all that I believe and I think practice in some ways.

But I can hang on to things and then pray the cloud away while I'm hanging on to the cloud. No, no, you can't do it. So nothing will get to it.

And then there is fear. Fear is always a child of unbelief. No matter what, whether you've got cancer or whether your child's likely to have polio or whether you're likely to lose your job or whether she will send a guided missile and destroy Chicago.

Remember always that fear is a child of unbelief. And fear over your head and hide that smiling face from you. And then there is self-love.

Self-love. We make a joke out of it, but we never should make a joke out of it, friends. Because self-love is concealment, a cloud of obscurity.

And even the Christian who has offered himself to Christ and has been reverted, that Christian can keep a cloud of concealment over him simply by loving himself. And to fall out of love is an accident. That is, it is not only an accident, I mean a hurt.

It hurts you like falling off of something. And that's relation. And self-admiration.

It's self-esteem. They're there, remain there, and then the odd thing about it is that the scribes have excused me and proved that they should be there and who can't do anything about it. And yet we cry within us, Oh, that the candles of my soul might burn brightly even now.

Oh, the divine illumination of my Savior Jesus Christ. And we groan with the groan that goes back to Paul in Philippians, that goes back to David, that we might come into a warm, personal, pleasant, lasting fellowship with Jesus Christ that lifts us and irradiates our hearts. And yet we can't because we admire him and we're not going to have anybody disturb us and we congratulate ourselves and we love him.

And then there's money. Money these days gets between betwixt thee and thy God, there's a verse, betwixt thee and thy God. Some revangement years ago in my hearing pointed out that you can take two dimes and shout out, you can take two dimes with you to the Great Smoky Mountain and go clear to the top knob of the Great Smoky.

Shout out all the glorious, green, rolling, blue-capped, this smoky. Just put them in front of your eyes and put them close, that's all it takes. The mountains are still there smiling in the sun because there's a dime in front of each eye.

It doesn't take much money. We who don't have much money are always snide remarks that the rich man. But brother, you can be rich and only have ten dollars because if it is between you and God, then that cloud, that cloud is concealing God from you.

And then there's people, just plain people. The Lord tells us that we shouldn't be afraid of man with his breath and his nostrils. And yet there are people who are Christians with a cloud of fear above them.

Constantly a cloud of fear. They want to fit in. They want to fit in here and the sociologists tell us we must do this, that we must adjust to society.

And the schools are breaking the history and writing and reading and arithmetic and all the rest. They're teaching the children to not be queer and to get along well. Well, if you've got that as your goal, you have heart, my Christian friends.

And then there are our friends. And then there's a position we hold, whatever it may be, to our loved ones. And this is the tenderest and perhaps the hardest.

But that's all got to go. You say, then what is it? If this cloud is over my head, is a cloud of concealment? When my father's smiling and I can't see his face, what shall I do? Well, the old brother suggests, and I've to you as a beautiful illustration, he calls it a cloud of forgetting. He said, put this cloud that's above you, under you, as a cloud of forgetting.

And Paul said exactly the same thing. Forgetting those things which are behind. Force under those things which are before.

You see, the things which were behind Paul were a cloud. If they'd been in front of him, then he'd cut out God. But he put them behind him.

His deceit, his mistakes, his errors, his wrongs, the times he'd fallen on his face, and the time the Lord had his pride, and all this, he put them behind him, and under his feet is a cloud of forgetting. And the old man, as God said, under you. And he said, now have them not betwixt thee and thy God.

Like so he put a cloud between betwixt thee and all the creatures that ever God made. We've got to get that cloud of forgetting under our feet. And of course, that's the job of the Christian.

And that's why I'm preaching like this. And some are understanding about it. Others are not.

Others have come up to me, Acadis Barnea, want to reach to me, and have turned back to wonder why they're standing in their shoes. It's because we would not go on Acadis Barnea. Right? So forgetting these things, and all this that has been a cloud of confusion, now becomes a cloud of forgetting.

The face of God, I repeat, is smiling still. And not all the cloud I've mentioned, and not all the cloud the devil can blow up there. And the devil can come and put it between you, betwixt you, and the face of your God, experientially, but that God is waiting within the veil, or the king, the figure, he's waiting for you to move up, to move up.

I remember getting on a plane at LaGuardia Field in New York some years ago. It was about, I would say, three o'clock in the afternoon. The smiling, relaxed, friendly pilot came out and made a little speech.

He knew that old doctors like me would worry about because it was raining. It was a miserable day, like as we get here sometimes. Just plain miserable.

And he said, now, I'm leaving in a moment. And he said, the situation is this, friends. In 15 minutes we'll be in the sunlight.

In 15 minutes we'll be in the sunlight. And he says, the weather report shows from here to Chicago. And sure enough, it was.

And so we got into that plane almost feeling a little smog and a mist. And in 15 minutes we had put the cloud under our feet. And the bright above.

And as we rose, even the cloud became white beneath us. You alone a lot have had the experience of seeing that gray wood trees that are underneath you white as whipped egg. And when you were underneath they were a misty, miserable, smoggy thing that cut out the sun.

But in 15 minutes they put them under. And oh brother, is it nice to take off in the smoke and rain and fly 900 miles in the sun. Now, that's what I mean.

Does that make a fanatic out of you? Come on, let's not be fanatics. Just go and sit there in the air. That fanaticism ought to make a fanatic out of you.

But I have to warn you. No, no, that's not fanaticism. Fanaticism is going against the scriptures, imagined things, dreams.

And he has to interpret the word of God. But he can't go over one line of the word of God. Not one line.

It's all here. The doctrines of this place. The place of living still.

So what about it? I take it and you take it. Now if you can go and put that cloud of self, and cloud of self-love, and cloud of stubbornness, then there's nothing to it. For all of you have nothing to do.

You can't find heaven on a rope ladder. There's nothing for you to do. Take the hand of the Lord, divine.

I take it. Take it. Promise.

Mind. The vision. Change.

Come to shine. I take. Here I'm going to take.

I take it and say, Lord, I give myself to you. And thou according to thy word, there's only a sin to it. Go on and go on and take it.

So many great Christians have been walking around that little cloud for a long time. You can't get above it, you just can't. So you try to permeate your way above it, you try to believe your way above it.

That way, you can't. You've got to put it on your feet. And rise above it.

And put all these Christians and all the preachers God ever made, and look away to the sunlight. When you are alive, there is nothing a normal man can do. He can't sell himself as a holy ghost.

He can't turn his own head. He can't crucify you. He can't.

God has to do it. And you do it. And you wait, optimistic, and friendly, and on your side.

Wanting to help you. Anxious to go. If you could use the word anxious, it's such a good word.

But when you sit back, and you believe, and you've been with so many authors, and you've read so many books, you're all confused. Until the sunshine comes. Until God's cool, simple wind started on the way to you.

Into this sunshine in fifteen minutes. Into this sunshine in fifteen minutes. And that's the faith that man has brought to you tonight.

If you put it all in your head and in your feet. And look away to the Lord Jesus. Not trying to tell him what to do and how to do it.

But look. And over the next thousand days and weeks, you will move upward into a pure, restful, true power, such as you never knew before. And you'll have a marvelous living.

A marvelous future. You believe in the future. You believe in the way that is dark, and it's very bleak for us.

It's luminary for us. You believe in it. And yet outward that there will come presence, and radiance, and illumination.

It's in you every day. Are those words that you're saying then, you know what I'm talking about, don't you?

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/5/SID5740.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-tozer/i-press-toward-the-mark/>

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