

# Life of the Servant #2 'Serving the Church's Spirit, Soul & Body'

by A.W. Tozer

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*A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of serving the church's spirit, soul, and body to fulfill God's will and impact future generations.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:16, Acts 13:36, Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Galatians 6:2, Ephesians 4:11-16, Colossians 3:23-24, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Peter 4:10

**Topics:** "Spiritual Vitality", "Serving the Church"

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## Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of serving the church's spirit, soul, and body, drawing parallels between the church and the individual believer. He argues that just as David served his generation by the will of God, so too must the church fulfill its divine purpose by nurturing its spiritual life, cultural standards, and organizational structure. Tozer highlights that the church's true power lies in the Holy Spirit, and that spiritual dangers threaten its existence more than any external factors. He encourages believers to recognize their role in serving their generation, whether through visible acts or quiet contributions, and to maintain the church's vitality through a commitment to spiritual growth and community. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a church that is alive in spirit, refined in soul, and active in body, ensuring it continues to serve effectively in the world.

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## Transcript

Message 2 of 3 on The Life of the Servant by A.W. Tozer

"Serving the Church's Spirit, Soul and Body" January 25, 1959

Now this is the second of two talks on this text, second of three, or there will be one more, I think.

For David, Acts 13:36. For David, after he had served his generation by the will of God, fell on sleep. And last week, I said that no man has any right to die until he has served his generation, until these three things have taken place. One is that he's found his place in the will of God. Second, that he has put into life more than he's taken out of it. The third, until he's put his generation in debt to him.

This is almost an obsession. I don't like the word obsession to be used of Christians, although it seems to me I heard of a book title, which the book I've never read called, Magnificent Obsession." I think it's a good title even though I have never read the book. But this magnificent obsession has a hold of me. I want to

put my generation in debt to me. I've taken a good deal out of them. And they've contributed a good deal to me. But I'd like to put this generation in debt to me before I hang up my shoes. I think everybody should.

Oh, I think I ought to stop here my friends. I think I ought to stop here and say something that I might never say if I don't. Somebody hears me and says, Now I know what he's talking about. He's thinking about painting a great picture, writing a great book, founding a school, or doing something like that, that will live on. Maybe there'll be gymnasium named after him or there'll be something like that. That's what he's talking about Torrey-Gray Auditorium, or the Blanchard Hall or Simpson Memorial Church or they will do something of that sort.

Yes, I do have something like that in mind. But I also would like to tell you that it's possible to put your generation in debt to you and never be heard of outside of your own city block. Don't you think that Susanna Wesley put her generation and all other generations in debt to her when she had her 17 children? She didn't know. She died without knowing that she was putting all generations to come, as well as her own, in debt to her. She put more in than she took out.

And there's many a humble meet prayerful housewife, who has brought up her family and given them to the world and this society. Now, they're are old and overlooked and their names are written nowhere where it counts, except in that one place. But they nevertheless have put their generation in debt to them.

And I think of some old fellows whose English is not very good and whose job was to saw a board and nail it up or farm a farm or do something else and they say he was a little working man and he was never heard much of and his hands have calluses on them. And he's ill at ease and embarrassed when great people around him. We say, well, that man of course never did much. But maybe he has a doctor Son out on the mission field. Maybe he has a child serving the Lord in some important pulpit preaching the Word of God in some pulpit giving the Word out. And it was he who put them through and kept them and cared for them.

And these calluses are the marks. They tell a story and the eyes of God can read poetry in those calluses. And art and, and the ear of God can hear music in those calluses because that now the more or less forgotten old fellow, soon to retire and pass away and has produced and has brought up and has to the best of his ability prayed through a family that is serving Him.

There's more than one way to serve your generation my brothers and sisters. There are others, and I think of one family in this church who have no children at all of their own. But I think of that family and I say this whether they're present or not, I don't care this morning. I think there's a number of youngsters that they've fathered and mothered and watched over and brought to church and given clothing and all that sort of thing down over the years. And if I didn't mention it occasionally, nobody would know it. They are serving their generation and putting their generation in debt to them. There's more than one way to do it.

What I especially want to talk about this morning is that this David, serving his generation by the will of God before he fell on sleep, is a kind of picture. I don't like the word "type," but he's a kind of picture of the church. And as I said, man is made up of body, soul and spirit. Spirit, soul and body would be a better way to state it. For it's in that order of importance.

The church of Our Lord Jesus Christ is a trinity as man is a trinity. That is, a man has a spirit, that's the most important part of him. And then man has a soul, which is a little lower than the spirit, but vastly higher than the body. Then, man has a body through which the spirit and soul work and operate as a musician

has an instrument. That musician, though he be a genius, could not bring music unless he had a hard body of instrument in front of him. So, the spirit of a man, the mind of a man, cannot operate without the body.

The church is a great deal like this. The church is a spirit and the church also has a soul and the church is also a body. Let me go over that. That will be the sermon for today. The church is a trinity. It has its spirit corresponding to the spirit of the man. The Holy Ghost is the throbbing heart of the church, let's not forget it. There is no such thing as a church without the Holy Ghost.

Although there are many people, many groups calling themselves churches who do not have the Holy Spirit and do not even believe that there is a Holy Ghost. And yet they call themselves churches, but still it stands there is no church without the Holy Spirit. Because all that the church is, is spiritual. That is at the very root of the church its spiritual. The origin of the church is spiritual. The church was not brought together by some accident, but she was born. In every generation she has to be born and she is kept alive.

Just as the human race in the very root of it, there is life, life, life. And its life that is passed on from generation to generation. It was life that your parents passed on to you and life you pass on to your children and life they'll pass on to their children. And the body built around it is secondary. It's that life, that thing, that human life that comes down from generation to generation.

So, the church is kept alive by this life that is passed on, this holy living, throbbing life of God in certain people who band themselves together. And there we have the church, the life of the church. The origin of the church is spiritual, the life of the church is spiritual and the power of the church is spiritual.

We happen to be in a moment, not progress, but a motion of religion where a great deal of emphasis is now being put upon the intellectual side of the church. But always remember, that the power of the church is not intellectual. The power of the church is spiritual. Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses under me. And the book of 1 Corinthians tells us in great and careful detail how the Spirit of God is that power and works through His people.

So the church is spiritual. It's spirit. And the power of the church is spirit. And the enemies of the church are spiritual. Remember, the enemies of the church are spiritual. Just as you come down with a disease and you wonder what its source was, and the doctor will tell you its source was an invisible germ, or virus. So when troubles arise in Christians or in Christian groups, we say who's at fault? Who's to blame? The answer is an invisible virus is to blame. It's an invisible, spiritual thing.

The enemies of the church are all spiritual, don't forget it. At root, they're all spiritual and the dangers of the church are all spiritual. There are no dangers to the church except spiritual dangers, or dangers that have their root in spiritual things. And there are no perils, no damage or injury can be done to the church, except it's done to her spirit.

When the church, for instance, was persecuted in Jerusalem, they had lived very joyously together in Jerusalem, after the first initial persecution had worn off. They were gathered together, those disciples in Jerusalem. Then came a terrible persecution about Steven. And they were scattered abroad every place. The church that had worshipped with such joy there in Jerusalem was now scattered throughout all Asia Minor to preserve their own lives.

Someone could say, why that meant a breakdown, a loss, a destruction of the church. But history doesn't record it that way. History doesn't say, that was the destruction of the church. History says, that was the beginning of the great drive that evangelized the whole world within 100 years. And the Apostles and the Christians were driven from Jerusalem under the persecution and they went everywhere, preaching. Those very words are used. They went everywhere preaching.

Sometimes, I have a human pang that so many of our people have gone to so many parts of the world. I'd like to have them all back, wouldn't you? Wouldn't it be a gathering here if we had them all back. We would have to throw the old building open and use this lawn out in front. For those who have come and been with us a few years, have met God and have had their direction set, their eyes open, their heart unlocked. They have learned to love the Lord Jesus and appreciate great music, great worship, the cause of world missions, the helping the poor and sweet Christian fellowship. Their work took them or better still, they went to school, and now they're out somewhere serving. In times I say and wish, Oh, I wish we had them all back.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could gather them all together, and they were all here. And I can preach to them one more time. But yet I wouldn't be so carnal as to allow myself to wish this. Because just as Jerusalem, the church in Jerusalem was suddenly by an explosion thrown to all parts of the world and wherever they went, they preach the word and started churches. So, our people have gone over the last 25 years, and wherever they've gone, they have been very often the life and the pillars of the churches where they're serving. And some are in pulpits and some in mission stations all over this round world and the sun never sets on your people.

Now, the dangers I said are spiritual dangers. If we can get through to God about it and can reach God, no real danger can come to us. I preached a sermon here during the council. I preached it in the morning. Numbers of people have wanted it in print, but I've never gotten time to write it down. It was taken from First Peter and the name of it was, "Nothing Can Harm a Good Man." I still believe that with all my heart. You can kill him, but you can harm him. You can put him in jail, but you can harm him. He can have a stroke, but he can't be harmed. He can die in an airplane accident, but you can't harm him. You can't harm a good man, a man in the will of God, a man who's consecrated himself and put himself in the will of God.

Mr. Chase was telling me today of hearing Melvin Lobstin. He said he had never in his entire Christian life had heard a testimony so sharply sure of itself, as this boy's. He said, it's not a question of going to a mission field, wherever I'm sent, I know where I belong. I know where I am to go. And he was as certain of that just as certain of that, as a soldier would be, who'd heard his commanding officer telling him where to go and what to do.

Now, Melvin Lobstin is gone. Do you think he's been harmed? Do you think this thing has blown up in God's face? Not for one second has it blown up in God's face. Before he went Melvin Lobstin found somebody that could do ten times what he could do and won him and you don't know where that person is, but God knows! Or back home on the field, somebody will hear that. Some tall, young fellow will stand up awkwardly and say, I want to be a missionary. And the death of that man will bring forth a man to do a greater work than he could have done.

God is running His world and He's running his church. He's still on His throne. And if he doesn't know it, we ought to serve notice now on the devil, that he can't harm a good man. Because the dangers of the church are spiritual dangers. And if we are in the will of God and protected by the fiery Presence in the

bush, Satan can't get to us.

And the treasures of the church, our spiritual treasures. We get old and weary and tired and go to an old folks home or shunted off someplace and sit around and look at the floor. Listen to a WMBI and read magazines and read our Bibles and dine. A new generation doesn't even remember who we were. That's happening all the time. People who a few years ago were stalwart members of some church with the church leaning on them. Today they are somewhere and people don't even know who they are. And somebody will say, Did you hear that Reverend So and So or Mrs. So and So died or Mr. So and So. The young people will look up and say, I don't believe I knew them. But they've left their treasures and they took their treasures. And they've got their treasures. Spiritual treasures or treasures of a Christian are spiritual. They lie in the heart of the man. You can't by changing the body structure, or by breaking it down or destroying it, you can harm those treasures. They are sent up above.

The next is the soul. The church is a trinity and she is first of all spiritual and most of all spiritual. Do you know something friends? If there was no other reason for this church holding together and going on through the years as it would be, that this that I've been telling you this morning, which sounds so trite to you, because you've heard it so much, is just what's not being said scarcely anywhere in evangelical circles. And if this church ought not to hold together and maintain its testimony and its solidity through the years to come, if for no other reason it ought to be that this emphasis should be laid.

The church should be reminded that she's a spiritual group and that her origin and life and power and enemies and dangers and treasures and power all lie in the Holy Ghost. But next is the soul which corresponds to the soul of the man. I'll be brief on this. But I say that the Soul of a man is lower than his spirit, but higher than his body. I admit that sometimes soul and spirit are used interchangeably although there is a difference.

The soul of the church has to do with her tastes, her standards, her appreciations. The soul of a man is, let's go out to the world for an illustration. Saturday afternoon on the radio, there will be, I'm just guessing because I can't tell you where to turn, but there will be the New York Philharmonic playing from Mozart. You can turn your knob just a tiny fraction and you'll hear the wildest rock and roll. There are groups that are enjoying both. It is just a question of your appreciation. It just a question of the soul, your tastes.

If you have a radio like mine, I have a little Zenith with FM and AM which in clear weather I can bring in stations from way down in the southwest. I can hear a fellow saying, all right now neighbor write in and get my song book, square notes and round notes. And their songs all have to do with hillbilly stuff, a guitar and a swing. They are some Christians get help from that I suppose. But it's too bad that they do, because the soul of the church is the cultural level of the church. It determines that the spiritual or aesthetic level of the church.

A generation ago fundamentalism's aesthetic appreciation took a nosedive into the gutter. Twenty or twenty-five years ago already, I told an editor I was going to write an article called, "The Cult of Ignorance and The Cult of Ugliness," being the two cults that are in charge in among the fundamentalists. He wanted to print it, but I never wrote it. It was probably a good thing I didn't. But it's still true, the cult of ignorance and the cult of ugliness has ruled in the church of Christ too long. The church should be the most cultivated, the most refined, the purest, the loftiest, the most elevated group of people to be found anywhere in the wide world.

So, the church has a soul. She's essentially a spirit and take the spirit away and you've got nothing left but a dead body. But along with her spirit she has the soul, her appreciations. The church ought to be, I've always said, that if the church was doing the job she's supposed to, there would never be any reason for a Bible school. There would never be any reason for a theological school at all unless it might be for specialized studies, say in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and a few things that a church normally could not teach.

But if the church was where she should be, her people would come out instructed with her appreciations lifted, trained and polished. But we meet together and sing "let Jesus come into your heart" and then send our people off to Bible school to get the instruction they could have gotten if the church had had a soul as well as a spirit. If here mentality, her mind, her ability had been up to where she belonged

I'll just quit when it comes to twelve o'clock. I'll just quit, because I feel these things so deeply that you'll excuse me for leaving my outline and talking about them, but we say, well, we're living in a different time now. And we've got to simplify religion now in order to make it appeal to the masses. You know that the uneducated Roman masses were supposed to understand the book of Romans after they were converted and brought into the church? A lot of those Christians in Rome were not learned men. They were intelligent men, and they were quickened by the Holy Ghost into life. And they got into the church which is in Rome. And they were supposed to be able to hear read, and to understand the book of Romans which is said to be the profoundest book ever written.

And look at the writings of John. Look at the writings of the Gospel of John and 1 John. He wrote for the simple people. Look at the writings of Peter. He wrote for the simple people. Look at the Methodist of 200 years ago. I read their sermons and study their hymn books. There isn't one cheap song in their hymn book. Were they learned? No. Probably ninety or ninety-nine percent were plain people, people that went to fifth grade, sixth grade, some went to the eighth grade and in some places there were no grades.

The Little Red Schoolhouse and the teacher who taught all grades. You know how it was in the early days, but they sang the great old songs. The fire of God was on those great old songs. And they turned America around to be a great Christian nation, a great Protestant nation, with their testimony strong and wonderful.

Our teachers that now write our literature and lead our publishing houses and edit our magazines say that's all out. That we don't, we can't hope to in interest the multitudes unless we simplify things. So, we simplify them until you can actually take your finger and play with your lip. So perfectly, terribly low. I've tried to make this church understand over these years. I've tried to make this church understand that either there's nothing to this at all, or else God has made us higher than the angels and has lifted us to a place above other creatures. And that we are called to be the loftiest and the most cultured, the most refined and the most thoughtful people in the whole wide world.

Then third, and last is the body. The body, of course corresponds to the body of a man. The spirit of the church corresponds to the spirit of the man and the soul of the church corresponds to the soul of the man and the body of the church corresponds to the body of the man. Now body is organized living matter. Living particles that have not organization, two things about them, one is they can't stay alive long, and second, they have no control and therefore can't be used.

That's why I believe in the church. I believe in thy church O God, the house of thine abode. I believe in thy kingdom God. I believe in the group of believers, whether it's a happy little group such as meets down in South Holland or whether it is a group going through the grist mill as we are here, or whether it's a great crowd the size of Moody Church. Whatever, remember one thing, a body is the way the Holy Spirit works.

He works through a body and the soul of the church must have a body to operate in.

That's why I can't go along with those who say I don't believe in joining a church. I believe we should. I believe that we should identify ourselves with some local fellowship as they did at Corinth and Rome and Laodicea and the rest of the places. Be present there and let everybody know I'll be there. If possible, I'll be there barring a blizzard or an earthquake, I'll be there.

And so just as a man has a spirit and a soul, but he can't work. His spirit and soul can't work. Shakespeare's spirit and soul didn't write his tremendous poetry. That number the choir did here happens to be one of my most wonderful favorites. Largo Handel, Holy Art Thou. Handel's spirit didn't write that. Handel's spirit was the source of it. His soul enabled him to do it. But it was the body that put the notes down. His life was organized. He was organized. The man was organized. God organized him and put a soul and spirit in him.

So, the church must be organized and must work as a body. If you can take the spirit and soul out of a body and you have not a living body anymore. You have only an organization without life. And there's lots of that. Or you can take living Christians and teach them that they can just tramp around anywhere and you'll have disembodied life. But if you have Christians who are born of the Spirit and quickened into life, and then get into body, a group, then you have perfection. You have organized living matter.

The body of the church is all that is external. You can't see the soul of the church and you can't see the spirit of the church. You have to see the body of the church and that's all. The body of the church is all the external, visible, social life of her, that which we see here, that which we see in our missionary convention times, that which we see when there's any trouble, or anybody dies or somebody is ill. Or that which we see when persecutors come as they have in some countries. That's the external, active, visible, spiritual and social life of the church, her creed or vows, her gatherings, her loyalties, or cooperation or good works, her worship, her fellowship, her love. This is the body of the church, that is, as far as we can see it, the external part.

Through that body, the church operates, or the Holy Ghost operates, to do two things to witness and to do good works. The witness of the church is her witness to Jesus Christ, her witness to Jesus Christ and her works.

So the church is able to serve her generation by the will of God and fall on sleep. Drive out through the country and you'll see churches standing, weeds around the door if it's summertime. Obviously, there's no services there. Get out and mosey back and you will see a few graves out there. It's plain that there's been a shift in population. The farmers that used to be there by the hundreds are there only now in twos and threes and they're within driving distance of a town. So that church doesn't serve anymore.

Satan walks around such churches, I suppose three times a day with a leering smile on his face, saying, uh huh. There used to be the voice of prayer rising here, but the doors are boarded now and the windows are stoned out. And owls are where the bell used to ring. And he tries to comfort himself that there's been a failure there. That Jesus Christ has suffered a loss there.

My brothers and my sisters, if you could call out of their dusty graves, the old bearded farmers and the old plenty heavy, but plenty busy housewives, their wives and the fine young people that were born to them and grew up and now maybe are middle aged or old, and then you could trace their service. You could see if there was some by some miracle a light could go out from that church to all parts of the world where they

were blessed all over the world. I think the devil would crawl away and snarl with disappointment instead of sneer.

They served their generation in the will of God. And then they fell on sleep. And times changed. Henry Ford came along with his four wheels and a motor that could almost talk English and chug, chug, chug, and then the Wright brothers came along. And then along came plastics and missiles and factories and the conveyor belts and push buttons and Thomas A. Edison and all the rest. So there's nobody out there anymore to go to that church. Don't you drive by a church.

I have often seen statistics by poor fellows mourning and lamenting and saying, woe be unto us. Because there are now thousands of churches in rural America with nobody in them. There's another way to look at such things my brothers. Statistics can lie to you. Those saints who from their labor rest, once sang the great hymns of Zion in those little churches. And out from there, there went doctors and lawyers and senators and preachers and missionaries and devotional writers and hymn writers and they're scattered around the world. So, don't for a minute let the Devil talk us down. He's a great strategist you know and a great propagandist. If he can slip a bit of statistical propaganda into you and make you think there's been a failure some place, he'll do it.

The treasures of the church I say, are spiritual and they're laid up in heaven and she can't be harmed. God will raise from there dusty graves, all those dear old saints who served their generation by the will of God and fell asleep. The little body, the little group there that used to recite their creed and kneel at their altars and make their holy vows and gather in, in their sleighs and repeat their loyalties and cooperate in good works. They are gone now and a little old church is locked up, but there's nothing lost after all. Because the treasures that they had are still in existence. Their God has them put away in His everlasting vaults to be brought out in the day of Christ's return and paraded before all the intelligent world. They served their generation and fell on sleep.

So, this church has a spirit and a soul and a body. I pray that its spirit may remain warm and sweet and divine. That its soul may never be degenerate by low tastes, bad teaching and poor objectives, and that as a body we will continue. We must! It's got to. It's got to. Too many people looking this way. You can put out fifteen churches out in these outlying areas, fifteen churches, and then put one church like this and have more missionary money go out of that one church and out of all the other fifteen or twenty. I know that.

I was called on one time to speak at a women's group. It was not for one local church mind you, not one local church, but it was a whole conference of a certain denomination. They had somebody else coming. What was his name? He used to be governor of Hawaii I believe. This brother, a preacher, he was supposed to be there and he got sick or something. So, they called me up and I said, all right, I'll go. So I went down preach to them. And you know what? The missionary leader, a woman of that conference, was joyful and I didn't have the heart to disillusion. She was joyful. You know how much money they raised? Six hundred dollars. They raised six hundred dollars in a whole conference for missions. One class in this church will give more than that.

Brethren, we've got to not only keep the spirit up and the soul together, but the body. You say, well, if somebody else has the gospel, let them. Yes, somebody else has the gospel, but as I explained, their emphasis is different. And they can live and have their banquets and their bowling clubs and all the rest. And they're fun, and worship a little on the side and continue a lifetime. And in their entire lifetime, not send out as many missionaries as we send in one year or give as much to missions as we give in one

year. And that's not to boast. That's simply to say, we've tried to keep close to the Holy Ghost, close to the person of Christ, close to God, close to the New Testament. Churches like that can't die. Do you hear me? It can't die.

Well, all right, next week, I'll finish

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