

# Sharpening the Axe

by A.W. Tozer

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*A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of intellectual engagement and self-improvement in strengthening one's faith and effectiveness in ministry.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 3:4

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Intellectual Engagement"

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## Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of engaging with the world intellectually, arguing that a faith that requires isolation from criticism is not genuine. He reflects on the assurance that comes from a true encounter with God, which allows believers to face challenges without fear. Tozer shares wisdom from notable figures like Joseph H. Smith and John Wesley, who advocated for broad reading and intellectual growth as essential for effective ministry. He uses the metaphor of sharpening an axe to illustrate that a well-prepared mind makes spiritual work easier and more fruitful. Ultimately, Tozer encourages Christians to embrace knowledge and understanding for the glory of God.

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## Transcript

I have never subscribed to the doctrine that we Christians should live in an intellectual vacuum, refusing to hear what the world has to say. A faith that must be "protected" is no faith at all. If I can retain my faith in Christ only by closing my mind against every criticism, I give proof positive that I am not well convinced of the soundness of my position. The soul that has had a saving encounter with God is sure beyond the possibility of a doubt. His happy testimony will be, "To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side" (Psalm 3:4-6). Such a man will not need to shield himself from the classics nor from comparative religions or philosophy or psychology or science. The Spirit bears witness to Christ deep within his consciousness. His heart knows, though his reason my not yet have caught up with his heart.

When a very young minister, I asked the famous holiness preacher, Joseph H. Smith, whether he would recommend that I read widely in the secular field. He replied, "Young man, a bee can find nectar in the weed as well as in the flower." I took his advice (or, to be frank, I sought confirmation of my own instincts rather than advice) and I am not sorry that I did.

John Wesley told the young ministers of the Wesleyan Societies to read or get out of the ministry, and he himself read science and history with a book propped against his saddle pommel as he rode from one

engagement to another. Andy Dolbow, the American Indian preacher of considerable note, was a man of little education, but I once heard him exhort his hearers to improve their minds for the honor of God. "When you are chopping wood," he explained, "and you have a dull axe you must work all the harder to cut the log. A sharp axe makes easy work. So sharpen your axe all you can."

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