

(Steps Towards Spiritual Perfection) - Paul's Sel

by A.W. Tozer

The main obstacle to spiritual victory is self-trust, which robs God of the ultimate trust and misjudges God and man.

Duration: 51:04

Scripture: John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 4:15, 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, 2 Corinthians 4:7, Galatians 6:17, James 1:2-4

Topics: "Spiritual Perfection"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the importance of self-distrust and the ways in which God teaches it to His people. He emphasizes that relying on our own goodness and virtues is dangerous because we are unstable. The preacher mentions four valid ways in which God teaches self-distrust: through whole inspiration, through violent temptation, through other means not understood by us, and through the work of God's hand. He uses the analogy of a moon thinking it shines on its own, when in reality it is the sun that shines. The sermon encourages listeners to recognize their need for God's guidance and to trust in His ways rather than their own.

Transcript

I'm still in Philippians 3, and you know it. I'll not grind it out again by reading it once more. In 7 to 15 of Philippians 3, beginning with, But those things which were gained to me I found at loss for Christ.

As for the knower, he said, they found in him not having thine own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God's own sake. For by this, few things I might attain, and not as though I had all already attained, either were already perfect. But I follow after, and I forget the things that are behind, and I stretch forward, and let us therefore as many be perfect be as much.

Now, this man, this most aggressive man, this boldest man, this surest footed man, and this sincerest man. And if you think I'm overstating it, let me read to you some things he said. The Holy Ghost witnesses that in every city bonds and afflictions await me, but none of these things know me.

Neither count I my life near unto myself, so that I might finish my course in my ministry. First Corinthians, he said rather heartily, Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, ye have one father. Ye have not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

Therefore, be followers of me. First Corinthians again, fifth chapter, he said, I have judged already what to do concerning this man that has done this deed. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the power of the Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one that is taken for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

In relation he said, And henceforth let no man trouble me, let me alone. I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Now those are only five texts, if you'll find them all through Acts and the Epistles.

There was a sure-footedness about the man, and a deep crawling on his stomach. This man knew what he believed, knew where he stood, he knew his God, he knew his confidant, he was a great cosmic confidant. But that same man was yet the most self-disgustful man.

Listen to this, late first Corinthians, I am the least of the apostles, and there not need to be called an apostle. It is only by the grace of God that I am what I am. Second Corinthians, We have this stranger in earth and vessel, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of our persimmony.

This is a faithful saint, and worthy of all acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of which I am chief, Roman. For I know that he is in my natural place, in my body, in my natural nature, in whom Saint Paul saw.

For I know that in me dwelleth no good thing. Now I haven't exhausted these texts, I've only given you four or five proof texts on each side. And therefore we may properly conclude that Paul's great personal triumph on his side resulted from an entire and radical distrust of himself.

And that's what I am going to preach on tonight. Self-distrust as the last great obstacle, or self-trust as the last great obstacle to spiritual triumph. And this man Paul didn't trust himself.

Before man he was bold as a lion. Before God, he couldn't say too much against himself. He had no confidence in himself at all.

And the confidence of the man in God was in inverse proportion to his confidence in himself. As far as he trusted himself, he did not trust God. As far as he distrusted himself, he was thrown out before God.

Now self-trust, the respectability and self-assurance which comes by education, birth, what you hear about yourself, what do your friends tell you about yourself, and all the tests you make of yourself, self-trust is the last great obstacle to go out of the light. Thou shalt cling after the thing that's gone till it is gone. And that is why we wade around the deep river of God as animals around the waterhole, afraid to go in.

We never do quite get in. There was an old man that I want to quote a little tonight, not boringly. He had a wonderful name, I think, Lorenzo Cipolle.

I think that's a wonderful name. Well, Lorenzo Cipolle was one of those strange codices who, during his lifetime, he had a running fight, more or less, and was considered more or less a heretic because of his angelical views of the way back before 100 years. And this man said this, this trust in yourself is so necessary to you in this combat that without it you must hold it certain.

What I liked about the, what this man had said, and Paul and others, is the clear, sharp, language they use, and without any as-it-were stuff, without any of that, as-it-were and so to speak, and possibly, none of that. He said, this trust of yourself is so necessary to you in this spiritual combat that without it you must

hold it certain that you will not be able to obtain the desired victory. This trust in self.

And he said, we are much too easily inclined by our corrupt nature to a false opinion of ourselves. Without any foundation at all, we sleep painfully in our own sleep. Now, this, to continue, is a defect very difficult to understand, and most misleading in the eyes of God, who loves us and desires in us a loyal recognition of every grace and every virtue conceived from him alone, who is the fountain of all good, and that nothing, not even a good thought, can come from us except it be of his will.

Now, you can be converted, born again, and walk around and testify for 100 years, and never find yourself. In this case, you haven't been around 100 years, but you haven't found yourself yet. Now, you find out what power I have found, and what we did, we quote, but never actually done.

That this obstacle to spiritual victory is self-trust, and the sin has been put away. Every sin that we know has been put away in our search for God, and after all the self-sins that we know about have been crucified, we've stopped boasting, we've stopped loving ourselves with hate, and we've put away the hope of letting self-truth go where it can, and think that we're doing it wrong. And we've reckoned ourselves in dreams of the dead, have died under sin through dreams cut.

After we've humbled ourselves, we will permitly begin to imagine, after we've humbled ourselves, when self-truth may be stronger than it was before, because it has no foundation to build on. So, after we have put away our sins, and after we have given up our wealth, and after we have taken a full position, and allowed ourselves to be shoved around, and after we have been, Moses had been loved in the dark. Family, self-trust, whispered in consolation.

And a lot of people take that consolation of self-whispering there for the Holy Ghost, and that's why you're so woke when you think you're strong. Self-consolation or self-trust whispers like this, but now, and you put things behind you, and you confess and humble yourself. Now, you may trust yourself, of course you've got to help yourself, and you may expect the victory to come, and power to be at your side.

You're not one of these dead ones, you're one of these evil-eyed ones, self-tells you. And it's cost you a lot, hasn't it, brother, self-tells you. And you, you've had to part with friends in order to push on, hasn't you, self-tells you, rubs your back nicely downward, and you enjoy it so much.

Self says, you put things behind you, haven't you, yes, and you humble yourself. Now, you may trust yourself, you're up there, you're getting somewhere. Of course, you understand it's got to be God's help, but you may expect victory now.

Now, that's self-trust, brother, and almost all the joy the average Christian has is the back-stretching that self gives. That's all the pleasure he gets, is the back-stretching that he gets from self. Take a cat, and scratch it between the ears, and it'll close its eyes, and he's called hunkered down, that is.

Back in Pennsylvania, that brother knows what hunkering down means, hunkering, just, you know, crouching. I think that's an old Scotch word, and quite familiar to me as my boy. Well, the cat will do that, because they love to be scratched.

A cow will come and put her head over the fence, and scratch it between the ears, and pet her, and she'll love and stand there. Well, now, self is always scratching the ears of the people of God. And the further they go on into the will of God, and the deeper they go, the more back-stretching they get, the more ear-stretching.

And self says, well, certainly you know better. You've read Tom Seacantus. And you, you're different.

You love the old him. And you, none of this junk for you. And you're a separated Christian.

None of these movies for you. None of this crazy modern stuff for you. You're better.

And you don't know what's happening to you. You're feeling good. And your feeling good is strictly you're being scratched by a self that hasn't yet died.

Your self-trust is there, after you think it's gone. Now, why is self-trust so wrong? Self-trust is so wrong because it robs God to give to man. God says, you have robbed me.

And you say, where am I? Well, that was under another context. But we rob God, and we take away from God this thing that the brother wrote about, that he is, that God is the fountain of all good. And that nothing, not even a good thought can come from us except the fountain of God.

We take that away from God, and we give it to our converted and sanctified selves. And it's just as bad, just as bad as it can be, because it takes away from God the ultimate, the final trust. It misjudges God and man, and holds God to be less than he is, and man to be more than he is.

And this is mainly the trouble with it. We think God's less than he is, and man's more than he is. And we can go to school and study theology and learn how God is the source and fountain and all the rest, and learn about the attributes, and still, in our hearts, still believe God is less than he is, and we're more than we are.

And thus, it's like the moon. Suppose the moon could talk and think and have a personality. And the moon should begin to say, well, I shine.

I shine on the earth. And I, every time that I'm around where I can reach the earth, I see the earth become beautiful. And somebody would come and say, well, listen, don't you know that by yourself you're a bird's ash? Don't you know that you've been discovered and found out? You don't shine at all.

You reflect. It's the sun that shines. And I could see myself telling the moon, well, you're letting your light shine as if you're doing a good job.

I notice when you're not up, the whole side of the earth lies in darkness. But when you come lightened up and begin to see the roofs of houses, and you do a fine job, and the moon would nod and say, well, the glory belongs to God, and by the grace of God I'm like this. But all the time the moon thinks it's shining.

When the moon isn't shining at all, it's reflecting. And St. Paul could boldly shine and talk about it because he knew that he wasn't shining at all. He knew that he didn't have a thing that was set for heaven.

It was the grace of God in him. And if it was God and not him, he completely and radically distrusted himself. Now, no man ever really knows about himself.

He doesn't know how he feels. Just as no man really knows what he sounds like. Everybody thinks he sounds right until he hears himself on tape.

One of the most humbling things that ever happened to me happened about 10 years ago when I had my first sermon preached on Erechtheion. After I heard that, I never could stand the sound of my own voice.

Well, that thing didn't lie to me.

And I heard myself on tape dozens of times trying to work something out that I could use. But it always sounds terrible. But up to that time I had been told that I had a prime teaching voice, people coming, good voice.

But I heard myself. Nobody needed any more to talk to. I heard it.

I listened to it. I'd been forced to hear it. But no man knows the sound of his own voice until he hears it.

And no man knows how weak he is until God gets exposed. And nobody wants to be exposed. But God has to expose.

And what we consider our strength is our weakness. If you will think over your life forever and do carefully in prayer and put down on the pad the things you think are your virtues, those are your weaknesses. And those very virtues are your sources of trouble.

And the only way you can deal with yourself is look away and look under him, as I've been telling you. And stop thinking about yourself at all. Now, nobody can know how weak he is.

Nobody can know how bad he is until he's been exposed by the Holy Ghost. And nobody wants to be exposed. And nobody knows how unstable he is.

You remember that fellow in the Old Testament that said, is thy servant a dog that I would do a thing like that? Apparently he meant it. He went straight home and did it. The prophet said, you're going to murder your master.

He said, is thy servant a dog? The prophet didn't reply. He went home and put a pillow over his nasty face and smothered him to death. You remember a certain great old bold fisherman who stood up and said, let everybody else run from you, Lord, I'll not.

The Lord said, before the cross grows Christ, you will. And he did. Now, you will find that nobody knows how unstable he is.

And that's why it's dangerous to trust our goodness. That's why it's dangerous to trust our virtue, because we're unstable. Now, how then do we learn this stuff? Well, this stuff is indeed the work of God's hand, says the man.

And he's accustomed to give it to his dear friends in four ways. So I want to tell you, this takes the hide off, but here are the four ways that God teaches this trust. There may be some others, but these four are valid ways.

He says, it's the work of God's hand that's this trust. Now, I can't put it to room for you. That's too bad.

I saw a cartoon once of a fellow with a hole in the top of his head and a funnel, and somebody was pouring it in. And I've always had a kind of a goofy longing that I could do that with congregations. Just trip him and don't take all that.

Put a funnel in and pour it in, but you can't get it that way. All any preacher can do, and I don't care who he is, but he can do all he can do is say, all you can do is preach to the Lamb of God and on your own. And if

you don't make it, it's not the preacher's fault necessarily.

If he hasn't been quite honest enough, hasn't been quite severe enough, hasn't been quite powerful enough, maybe, but at least if he's done that one thing, that's all. Now, there are four things, says the dear old man of God, and what he says is supported and confirmed by almost all of the devotional writers and the great hymnists and biographers or persons about whom biography works. He says, sometimes it comes by holy inspiration.

Now, that'd be the best way to get it. The best way to find out you're no good is to have God flash a holy inspiration into your soul and just let you know about it. I think that's happened to some people.

I think it has. Brother Lawrence, you know, Herman, Nicholas Herman, Brother Lawrence, said it happened to him, and he said for 40 years he never was out of the presence of God alone, never out of the conscious presence of God. He said, when I took the cross and decided to obey Jesus and walk in his holy way, he said from reading around and hearing, I gathered that I have to suffer a lot.

He said, for some reason, God never counted me worthy of much suffering. He just let me continue to trust him. He said, I put all my self-trust away, and I'm trusting in God completely.

To paraphrase, he's tearing his cross, he said, and believing that he's in me and around me and near me, and praying all the time. And he said he'd never given me very much suffering to do. And I have told you, it's cited quite a little bit of attention around over this country, about little old Julianne.

There's a lady Julianne, and they're searching for her books and all the rest now. Well, she only wrote one, and outside of that one experience she had, when she got her three wounds, she never had too much suffering. After that, God gave by a holy inspiration light to her heart, and she knew instantly she was no good, and Jesus Christ was everything, and she stayed right there until she died, growing every day.

That'd be the easiest way to get it, would be for the Lord to come and give by a sweet, sudden hole of inspiration within our hearts and the scriptures tell us how bad we are. If you say, Mr. Closer, I already know I'm bad. I'm a believer in total depravity.

You can be a confirmed believer in total depravity, and be as proud as Wilson, and trust yourself so as to shut out the place of God and prevent victory. Theological total depravity isn't what you make here at all. I happen to be one of those who believes, according to the scriptures, that man is a sinner by birth, and an alien by birth, and a sinner by choice.

I believe that. I never believed anything yet. I never had any trouble with theology.

Some people are always writing, they're in difficulties with theology. Either I don't have sense enough, or the deities of God preserve me, because I never had any worry about total depravity and all that, and how I can inherit the evil from my father. I don't know a thing about it.

All I know is, as soon as I was big enough as him, I went into the business. And I know that every child I've ever known or seen no matter who you are, I said to the boys upstairs, I said, you know, every race and every nationality has its vice, doesn't it? Everybody, and he said, yes, all but the Irish. But every nationality, everyone has his own vice.

The vice that stands out. Beaten up to one place, did something else, and they all have one vice. What's the reason? At least one.

God knows there may be thousands, but at least I'll send, because we're all like, we're born bad. And we can believe that and accept it and teach it only to others. And those who most trust themselves may yet be the ones who are most often cruel.

All our righteous messes are but filthy rags. Careful to put the F on the end and confirm the fact that it's not singular but plural. Our righteous messes are filthy rags.

Now, you see, it takes the Holy Ghost to tell you you're bad and make you sick. It takes the Holy Ghost to tell you you're weak and make you sick. It takes the Holy Ghost to tell you you're weak, and you can go through and get a degree that long, and come out and still go proudly out to be a preacher, or proudly out to be a missionary, or a Bible teacher, or whatever.

He says, God is at war. He's in his friends, they're telling, showing his friends, speaks in self-distrust, sometimes with holy inspiration, or sometimes with harsh courage. That's more where I come from.

Sometimes with harsh courage. I don't know who we could use for a better illustration than the man Job. We pity Job so with human sympathy, and we sort of have to take Job's part against God if we don't watch ourselves.

And we certainly take Job's part against his wife. The only good thing I know about all that was that she was never heard of again. I don't know what happened to her, but she got out of the picture.

But have you noticed that this man Job was a long way from being a humble man? Do you ever notice it? He was a praying man, and he was a man who made sacrifices, blessed his children had sinned the night before at their party. He couldn't do it at any time. But listen to him now, long before the latter third of his long time, he said, well over Job's opinion, it's terrible.

And I know better than Job, it's terrible. You see what he said, he remarked, As I was in the doors of my work, and the people did not God be upon my family. When the almighty was yet with me, and my children were about me, when I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil.

When I went out to the gate to the sewer, and when I prepared my seat in the street. He was the big shot, you know, that's what they did then. They didn't have a city hall, they had a place at the head of the street, and there the big shot sat.

When the young men saw me, he said, they hid themselves, and the aged rose and stood up. Who was this coming down the street? Well, no bonus for you. Oh, he said, here I am lying, now in this ash pile, a miserable wreck.

They cast me out, nobody broke for me. He said, the day was when I went down the street, the young people hid themselves, the old people stood up. And princes were plain talking, they laid their hands on their mouths.

You think Brother Job was an ordinary rag-picker? Brother Job was a great man. And he knew it, and that was the trouble, and that's why he had to have all that happen to him. If you're great and don't know it, nothing will happen to you.

But if you happen to suspect it, and you love God, things will start to happen to you. And if they don't, it's because you're not far enough along to the Lord to touch them. He said, the nobles held their peace, and their tongues cleaved to the roots of their mouths.

When you heard his blessing song, and I delivered the poor when they cried, the blessing of the poor was upon me again. That was Job. He was just telling them what kind of fellow he used to be, and you're all so smart about this, this was a half-crack.

It was a half-crack. He had been fraternal now long, sitting on an ash-pile with his enemies all around him. But as time of God went on, and he fell over his foot, and discouraging began to bump into the soul of the man.

And then we'll not go into it, but you know how that time came when he said, Oh God, I've been talking and talking and talking, but now I've shut up. I've put my hand over my mouth. I am thine, oh God.

And when he got that lesson, then the Lord said, All right, go now, pray for the rest of them. So he prayed for the rest of them, and God gave him back twice more. Well, harsh virtues.

You know, I sound as if I belong to the 17th century. Nobody talks like this anymore. You don't hear anybody talk about it.

That's why everybody has to ring a cowbell to get a little bit of playing. That's why they have to bring in the talking horse in order to have any fun. Say, John 3, 16, bring in the horse.

And they all quote John 3, 16, and then have the horse plow the ground to show how many apostles there were. Twelve times for an apostle. That's why, because nobody wants to hear anything about our dear heavenly father being want to teach his children self-trust by, distrust by harsh virtues.

Now, some of you will say that man told you the hard news. You like to lay on the light. You know what? If I could, I'd preach on the 23rd Psalm every day for a year, every Sunday for a year.

Then after I was through with the 23rd Psalm, I'd pick up the 53rd of Isaiah. Then when I was through with that, I'd preach on 1 Corinthians 13. But if I did that, do you know where you'd be in the meantime? You'd be the spongiest, softest, sweetest bunch of no good that God ever got together.

God has to give us harsh scourge in something. It'd be like feeding your family nothing but sugarcoats. You know what would happen to them? They'd lose their teeth when they're twelve years old.

There has to be some solid stuff. The harsh scourge. We talk about it briefly and pass it by.

Nobody puts any emphasis there. Then the third, the third way is sometimes with violent and insuperable temptation. Violent and insuperable temptation.

When we're violently tempted and for a moment insuperably tempted, we're inclined to throw in the white towel and say, God, this is no use. No use, I'm no good. I've read about moody and Augustine, all the rest.

But no use, God, you don't want me. I'm finished. Forgetting that God is wont to teach his friends self-distrust sometimes by violent and insuperable temptation.

And sometimes when something blows up on you that you thought was dead and buried years ago, instead of your taking it as a proof that you're not a Christian yourself, you ought to take it as a proof that you're nearer home today than you were yesterday. And that your heavenly father is letting this thing happen to you to show you you're no good. Now, back to Brother Lawrence again.

He said that he walked with the Lord all the time. But he said, if ever I make a slip anywhere, he said, I never let it give me much trouble. I go straight to the Lord and I say, now, Lord, that's me.

And if you don't help me, that's what you can expect, for that's me. And he said, God, forgive me. And I went right on from there, not much trouble.

We are cured sometimes by men who are trying to help us, and they are trying to help us, that repentance is a long-drawn-out affair where we have to beat ourselves a long time. And I believe in that kind of repentance too. But there comes a time when we realize that the best way to handle anything, as Spinolan said, the best repentance is turn toward God and don't do it anymore.

That's the best repentance in the wide world. You did something last week that you're ashamed of and sit here under conviction and condemnation about. Say, how can I repent? The best repentance is to turn to the Lord, tell him, and then don't do it anymore.

That's the best repentance in the wide world. And these penitentiaries will let you fall down sometimes. What are they for? Are they proof that you're not too Christian to fall? No.

They're proof that your conscience is tender, you're very near to God, and that the Lord is trying to teach you that last lesson of self-distrust by a violent temptation. You'll remember Jacob's temptation from Egypt, and you'll remember Peter's, and all down the years we've been illustrated. In the name of the Lord, we are having the Father's want to teach us self-distrust by other means not understood by us.

By other means not understood by us. You know, we're all born theologians. When anything happens, we all like to run to the scripture and be able to quote it and say, now that's according to this verse right here, isn't it, brother? Yes.

What does that say in the margin? We've got it, and we have a certain confidence in ourselves. We know just exactly what's going on. This wise old saint of God said, sometimes God teaches you self-distrust by no matter what method, you don't know what's happening to you.

Have you ever been in that picture? If you haven't, and I think this is the ninth sermon on this text, and if you, if this hasn't happened to you over the last week, I ought to be in for it, because I'm doing no good here. But if you, if you don't know, if you don't know, you say, well, God won't even show me what's taking place. Well, he knows you're a theologian, and he knows that you're so proud of the way you rightly divide the word of truth, and that you can just disjoint the text just like a butcher getting your chicken ready for it.

And the word lies all out there carefully laid out, you know, just where to put your finger on this, and just where to put it on this. You're too smart for God to bless you, brother. You know too much, and you can identify everything.

And the dear heavenly Father knows that you don't know much after all, and so he lets things happen to you that you don't know what's happening to you. And your friends don't know, and when you go to somebody you trust, and you feel that oh, that man's a saint, he'll be able to tell you, and he looks blank,

and he can't tell you, and that's good, that's wonderful. It'd be terrible if we had some holy Saint Francis where everybody could go to and find out where they were and all about it.

God loves you too much, and he's trying to teach you to trust him and not people, not lean on people. I have been so scared that people would start trusting in me, leaning on me. God takes the crutches out from under there once in a while, just take me if you can trust me.

Now, these means that God uses, you don't know what they are, and you can't locate yourself. If you're a Christian, you know it, and you love God, and you're sick of all the nonsense in the world, and you're sick of all the nonsense in the church, and your heart's crying after God as though you're rolling after the rock of books, and your heart and your flesh cries out for God, even though you don't need God, and yet here's this obstacle, you still trust yourself. You're born again, you can say that, you can testify to it, you love your Bible, you have your prayer, you're a good Christian, but you still trust yourself.

And it made it harder for you to get rid of it because nobody talks about it anymore, only a half a dozen of us, left in fundamental circles, I guess. They never say anything about it, at least around this area. If you're a Christian at all, everybody scratches back your neck and says, Lord, it's God, brother, you're born again.

But the Lord says that's only the beginning. This baby that's there, just in case you're not hearing, I dare you wouldn't mind it, but this baby that's there, he's got a three-month-old, born in Germany, and I saw a father, Captain Gisk, and I said, hello, Captain, nice to see you again. We had a nice handshake in time, and this good fellow said about his baby, I said, how is the baby? Oh, he said, not much of a baby anymore, brother, so I said, no? And he says, three-month-old.

He wasn't kidding, he meant that. He said he's an only father, you know, and the only one he's had. Three-month-old, so he's a big boy now.

Well, sir, now that's so natural and normal that they watch every move that he does, in the first instance, in everything. And our Heavenly Father loves his people like that, and he loves you like that. And don't let anybody frighten, don't let anybody come along with wild stories.

If it was true that everybody that ought to be killed, if God killed them, we'd have a different preacher here tonight. If it was true that every time a Christian rebelled, God took his baby, we'd have lost all seven of ours. If it was true that every time we'd fail and miss the will of God and blunder out and do something wrong, the Lord put us on this shelf, I'd have been a piece of statuary by this time.

I just don't let them tell me those things. I know that. I know God.

And God isn't that kind of God. He isn't that kind of God. He only judges when there's nothing else to do.

When a lifetime of rebellion and hard unbelief and sin-loving and violent refusal brings judgment, then judgment falls. But the Scripture says it's God's strange work. God doesn't like to do it.

And when God is sending or allowing violent and insuperable temptations and harsh scourgings and strange means that you can't identify, he's not judging. He's watching you grow. And if I could use that word about God, he's proud to see you grow.

Zephaniah says that he will rejoice over us with joy and he will joy over us with sin. And if that isn't a picture of a father singing over his family, I don't know what is. And back in one of the late chapters in

Deuteronomy, it says that the beloved of the Lord dwells between his shoulders.

And as a lad, I carried my baby brother that way. Quick as I can say, God picks us up and carries us, makes all our bed in our sickness, and understands our thoughts. The nose were dust, and he's loving and patient toward us.

And so God isn't judging. God isn't angry. God is just wanting his children to grow.

And he has sometimes to give them some harsh scourges. Now what are we to do? Well, we're to trust him, and love him, and absolutely count on him. You know anybody you can count on? Some people you can count on? You know anybody you can count on? You say to yourself, well, let me see, would Brother so-and-so, would I count on him? Well, you know anybody you could count on if you were wrong? You wouldn't all count on a friend that were right.

Suppose you went wrong. You know anybody you can count on? Great old French preacher once said, My friend would pull a great cathedral, but my real friend should occupy these seats here. Now it wasn't a student, it was a realist.

You know anybody you can count on when you're not right? Well, I can tell you somebody. His name is Jesus, and God hath made this same Jesus Lord in Christ. So what you're to do is trust him completely and let him work.

And don't push him, don't struggle, don't beat the bench and say, God, you gotta do it now. If you're in the hands of God and obeying God, God's leading you. And know absolutely that God will never let you down.

He'll never, never let you down. And then, third thing I say to you is look around for footprints where you are. You don't know where you are.

God is trying to teach yourself this trust, and one of the hardest things, as long as you know what you're standing on. They tell me that an earthquake is one of the most shocking, excuse this pun, it's not a pun intended, one of the most shocking things. If it's a flood, you see it coming.

If it's a typhoon, you see it coming. If it's lightning, you'll hear the rumble. But when an earthquake begins, they say that you lose confidence in your equilibrium.

You lose confidence in kind old Mother Earth that's been solid. Long ago, you can remember, she was solid. When you put your foot down on it, you never fail.

And then one day, she suddenly goes berserk, and you almost lose your mind, when you're suddenly confronted with distrust in the Earth itself. Well, self-confidence is like that. You tend to put your foot down on your virtues, and on your reputation, and on what you are.

And then when God sends a little earthquake and upsets, and cracks up and breaks up, even that old confidence you had in yourself begins to go. It's a terrible thing, brother. But remember this, that you're not alone in that battle.

Look around for footprints, and whose footprints do you see? You'll see his, and you'll see the footprints of all the great things that ever have lived down in the Earth. Oh, brother, out in Hollywood, they say they have a place, kind of a ungodly, upside-down Westminster Abbey, where they immortalize some of the old-sized bulls in concrete. Some great, uh, some great, uh, actors, great names, they put his foot in the

concrete, and they let it harden.

See the footprints upstairs? Here, for as blows you the horn, what will happen to that footprint? Well, I'm not interested in that kind of footprint. They're aimed in the wrong direction. They're aimed back the way I aimed, and I ain't going back there.

So I'm not interested. I'm not even interested in the bust of Eisenhower. I'm not interested in any of these modern footprints, but, uh, you look around, you'll find footprints all aimed in the same direction, toward the feet.

And you'll find the footprints of Jesus and the footprints of the saints. And there they are, all aimed in the same direction. You look carefully, you'll see some of them are kind of backtracking a little occasionally.

But they find their way last and go on. Now, be absolutely careful and confident and expectant. We want the Lord to do something for us, don't we? We want him to come down on us with a wave of grace and power.

We want him to come to us individually if we're not worthy of it as a congregation. We want to see a reformation, a revival, a downcoming with power. We want to see that.

And we're not going to try to work it out. But don't just count me out now. As the brother said, exclusively out of that.

Include me out of it. I don't intend to try to work up anything. You'll never climb Gates of Black without sweat and perspiration and hard work.

Look not back, look forward, look on him, and stop looking on yourself. And if the ground shakes under you, don't think it's a proof you're no good. That is, that you're not getting anywhere.

Just think it's a proof that God's showing you how worthless you are, but how dear you are to him. Once I wrote something, a sentence that I wondered whether I should have written, but God knew what I meant when I said, and repeat it to you tonight, that the only eccentricity that I can discover in the heart of God is that a God-like he is should love sinners as he is. Even God has that strange eccentricity.

Why does God love us? A mother may love a boy that he prayed her and sinned, now on his way to life in prison. That seems to be natural. But there's nothing natural about this love of God.

It's a divine thing. It's not pulled out. It's forced out by the inward pressure in the heart of the boy.

So God loves you, and he wants to take you on. And he will teach you if you'll let him. And he'll use the rules, and he'll let some harsh scourges come.

He may even let you trip. If that's heresy, all right, fine. He doesn't want to be harassed all the time.

He may let you trip. Not that he wants you to do wrong, but the only way he can show you that without him you'd be better now, all the time. And so when he says that that thing happened last week that you're so ashamed of, instead of that letting you, instead of that getting you down, instead of you letting it get you down, you ought to recognize that it is your father who wants to teach people self-distrust by violating the superlative in this.

Sometimes. That's one of the four ways. But I think for somebody, you have to use all three.

You can't change the fourth. But dear God, you know how wonderful that is. You know something? I rarely know where I'm going, but after I've been there a year, I can look back and see the path has been relatively straight.

You know, the thing about a bird, in other words, that funny little bird that said that it flew backwards because it didn't care where it was going, but it's curious to know where it was going. And it's really still just there. That's been my spiritual experience.

I go to God, I write my prayers down, I wait on him and remind him. Nothing seems to happen, and I seem to be getting nowhere, and then suddenly things begin to break around me. And I look back and I find God has been leading me every step, and I didn't know.

I didn't know where I was going, but I can look back and see where I've been. And I guess after all, maybe that's about it. Yes, I don't want to say look back always, but at least you have a right to take a quick look back over the happy terrain where God has been led you, up the valley where he has brought you.

But if you're going to trust him, it's too much to tell you where he is, and where he is farther on the way than others. Amen.

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