



The Center

Second in a Series

How deeply do men err who conceive of God as subject to our human will or as standing respectfully to wait upon our human pleasure. Though He in condescending love may seem to place Himself at our disposal, yet never for the least division of a moment does He abdicate His throne or void His right as Lord of man and nature. He is that Majesty on high.

A. W. Tozer

Where do we begin? Where do we begin the process of taking God seriously? We begin by taking hold of—by believing, by practicing, by living—one fundamental truth. It can be stated in a number of ways, but means the same no matter the arrangement of the words.

Brother Lawrence, who wrote in the late seventeenth century, described it as “practicing the presence of God.” He wrote,

When we are faithful to keep ourselves in His holy Presence, and set Him always before us, this not only hinders our offending Him, and doing anything that may displease Him, at least willfully, but it also begets in us a holy freedom, and if I may so speak, a familiarity with God, wherewith we ask, and that successfully, the graces we stand in need of. In fine, by often repeating these acts, they become habitual, and the presence of God is rendered as it were natural to us.

The late, great A. W. Tozer, who died in 1963, referred to this as “the pursuit of God.” In his famous book by that title, he wrote,

God formed us for His pleasure, and so formed us that we, as well as He, can, in divine communion, enjoy the sweet and mysterious mingling of kindred personalities.

The apostle Paul stated it succinctly and eloquently in his letter to the Romans.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Romans 11:36

The teacher R. C. Sproul distills it even further with the Latin “*coram Deo*,” which means, literally, “before the face of God.” Sproul expands its meaning: To live *coram Deo* is to live one’s entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God.



However one states it, we begin taking God seriously by acknowledging His centrality in our lives. He is not a neighbor; He is our spouse. He is not our buddy; He is our Lord. He is not our aged grandfather whom we visit once in a while; He is someone we live with, day in and day out.

God is not secondary; He is *primary*.

And the teaching of this important truth has long been absent from our churches.

The greatest fact of the tabernacle was that *Jehovah was there*; a Presence was waiting within the veil. Similarly, the presence of God is the central fact of Christianity. At the heart of the Christian message is God Himself waiting for His redeemed children to push in to conscious awareness of His presence.

Tozer

Making God the center, the pulsating nucleus of everything in our lives is only possible when we understand and accept who He is. Here, too, our churches, too often bending to the vagaries of modern culture, have diminished heaven in favor of earth. They have understated the supremacy and holiness of Almighty God and overstated the importance of man.

Today's worship services, especially, are typically geared more toward the convenience and comfort of the parishioners, than encouraging their expressions of devotion and obeisance to a holy God. As a result, even in that most important hour in the Christian's week, Sunday morning worship, the horizontal has replaced the vertical.

To the one who has determined to take God seriously, the vertical will always take precedence over the horizontal. Not that the horizontal—earthly relationships, friendship, witnessing to unbelievers, being salt and light in a fallen world—is unimportant. It is just less important than our relationship to and communion with God.

When one of the scribes asked Him which was the greatest commandment, Jesus cited the top two, placing them in their proper order from a heavenly perspective.

Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:29-31

Of course we are to love our neighbor, but we are to love God more. Of course we are to be devoted to our wife or husband, but we are to be devoted to God more.



Beyond uncluttered devotion and worship, the vital foundation of taking God seriously is training ourselves to see all of life by the perspective of heaven. Because this does not come naturally to us, we must practice this until it becomes unthinking habit, until we do it reflexively.

King David understood this. It was not perfection or a life of purity that gained him the Lord's approbation, but his acknowledgement that Yahweh was his sovereign Lord, and His way was always right. As the apostle Paul described it,

"After He had removed [Saul], He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart,

who will do all My will.”

Acts 13:22

Someone who lives this way does not fight back when chastised by God, but accepts His sovereign will. King David sinned egregiously—he took another man’s wife to his bed, getting her pregnant, then engineered her husband’s certain death in battle—and the Lord God exacted righteous punishment on David. He sent the prophet Nathan to David to voice His condemnation of David for his great sin. Nathan broached the subject with a parable.

Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said, “There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb, which he bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; rather he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”

2 Samuel 12:1-4

Thinking Nathan was describing an actual event that occurred in his kingdom, David was incensed, thus falling into Nathan’s trap.

Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion." Nathan then said to David, "You are the man!"

2 Samuel 12:5-7a

This is the critical moment. How does someone who takes God seriously react when standing naked in his sin before the great Judge? How will he react to the verdict when it is handed down? Here was the Lord's verdict:

"[Thus says the Lord God of Israel,] 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'"

2 Samuel 12:10-12

David's response? Did he shake his fist at God? Did he whine and feel sorry for himself? Here was his response:

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

2 Samuel 12:13a

That is the behavior of someone humble before the Lord: he does not argue or offer rationalization, but freely confesses his sin. But this is not yet the climactic proof that David had made Jehovah the center and foundation of His life. We see this later, once Nathan's final prophecy is fulfilled.

Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die."

2 Samuel 12:13b-14

The Lord struck Bathsheba's child, and for seven days David fasted and pled for the child's life, but he died. Did David then intensify his mourning? Did he at last shake his fist at the cruelty of his God?

So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped.

2 Samuel 12:20a

There is the heart and behavior of a man who has made God—and God alone—the center of his life. Even when so painfully chastised, he wipes away his tears, cleans himself up, and worships the holy God who directs his life.

To be continued...