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THE PROMISES OF GOD

THE PERMANENT WORD ISAIAH 40:6-8

GOD'S PROMISE TO YOU:
"My word is what determines what has lasting value."

Without pausing to debate the degree of their goodness, we can agree that some very powerful leaders and rulers have cast their shadow across the pages of time. Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Ramses, Genghis Kahn, Alexander the Great, the Caesars, and Suleiman the Magnificent fill the annals of history with their mighty exploits. Science, art, literature, medicine, politics—all of the realms of reason and passion have been explored and their ceilings raised by the combined human efforts of men and women through the centuries.

A number of mighty men from Assyria and Babylon brought their military strength to bear upon the tiny nation of Israel during the lifetime of the prophet Isaiah. These powerful Mesopotamian countries were mammoth compared to tiny Israel. Had it not been for God's intervention and providential timing, they would have swept down from Galilee to Jerusalem with even greater force than they did. But in the midst of the difficult days of Israel's travail, Isaiah brought words of comfort to Israel (Isaiah 40-66). The words made so familiar by Handel's *Messiah*, "Comfort, comfort my people" were God's words through Isaiah to Israel (Isaiah 40:1). And how could there be comfort in the middle of such national confusion? Because the men of power who were coming against Israel were "like grass" (Isaiah 40:6). As the breath of God withers grass, so the breath of God withers man.

But is it only the brutal, the evil, who are

grass? No, *all* men are like grass, Isaiah says. The good, the evil, the profound, the simple, the brilliant, and the base. No man or woman can stand before God in supposed glory; man's only glory is temporary and fleeting. But there is something that outlasts man, and that is the words that God speaks to man. Whatever God says to man—whether "Come . . . take your inheritance" or "Depart from me" (Matthew 25:34, 41)—is what will last. Our confidence is not in our accomplishments nor our fear in the lack of them. Our confidence is in the strength of his word. Are you prepared to hear his word to you?

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REFLECTIONS

Reflections on God's revealed truth
JANUARY 2010

A PERSPECTIVE ON MY PROBLEMS

(a prayer for renewal)

Dear Lord, may I frequently review the many acts of deliverance You have accomplished in my life. When I remember Your saving acts, I gain a renewed perspective on Your graciousness and involvement in my life. When I forget to do this, I sink back into a temporal perspective and lose the cutting edge of gratitude and trust. I want to recall Your glorious promises and remember Your creative deliverances so that I will grow in trust and not slip into doubt. With this perspective on my problems, I will not back off in disbelief and miss the opportunities You have provided for me. May I look at things through the lens of Scripture so that I will know how to respond to the circumstances and people in my life.

A teaching letter to encourage believers to Develop a Clear Mind and a warm heart



THE PURSUIT OF GOD—PART 11

This Reflections series is based on my 11-part CD teaching series on A. W. Tozer's spiritual classic, *The Pursuit of God*.

Removing the Veil

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." (Hebrews 10:19)

Third Question

In chapter one of his classic book, *The Pursuit of God*, Tozer invited us to ask the question: "What do you want more than anything else in the world?" It was a question that probed our priorities. It was followed by a second question in chapter two, "What are you willing to pay for that which you want most?" This was a question that examined the price of getting what we want most. Now in chapter three a third question is presented, "What is keeping you from laying hold of what you want most and are willing to pay for?" This is a chapter about barriers between you and God—barriers that you have willfully erected and carefully maintained.

Here we focus on the importance of having unobstructed fellowship between the One who longs to love and the one who longs to be loved. Both lovers must attend to those obstacles, each taking the initiative and responsibility for what only they can do. And so, when mankind's path to God was blocked by sin, God began a major initiative to remove that which only he could remove. In the beginning he disclosed himself in and through the natural world, and later he revealed himself more perfectly in and through the Incarnation. And today, A. W. Tozer says, "He waits to show himself in ravishing fullness to the humble of soul and the pure of heart." Having once and for all torn down the wall of sin that separated God from man, he bids us tear down the wall of self that separates us from God.

What separates us from God? Tozer

suggests that is a veil. A veil "woven of the fine threads of the self-life, the hyphenated sins of the human spirit. They are not something we *do*, they are something we *are*, and therein lies both their subtlety and their power." This "self-life" he is referring to is simply the title of an entire catalog of self-sins: "self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-admiration, and self-love." And from our modern self-addicted society we could easily add: self-absorption, self-abuse, self-analysis, self-centeredness, self-content, self-destructiveness, self-help, self-gratifi-



cation, self-hatred, self-indulgence, self-service, self-willed—the list keep growing as long as "self" is alive.

Tozer observes that most Christians naively think that a regular diet, consisting of the proper biblical instruction in the fundamental doctrines of man's depravity and God's justification, will alone break the stranglehold these self-sins have over us. But such teaching, as valuable, and true, and necessary for spiritual wellbeing, is not enough to free us. For . . .

" . . . self can live unrebuked at the very altar. It can watch the bleeding Victim die and not be in the least affected by what it sees. It can fight for the faith of the reformers and preach eloquently the creed of salvation by

grace and gain strength by its efforts. To tell the truth, it seems actually to feed upon orthodoxy and is more at home in a Bible conference than in a tavern. Our very state of longing after God may afford it an excellent condition under which to thrive and grow."

"Oh, wretched man that I am. Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24)

Rest for the Restless Heart

Tozer begins the chapter with the great Augustinian phrase, from his autobiographical masterpiece *Confessions*, "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in You." It is a sweeping statement about the origin and history of the human race, and that

only to the person with a restless heart—the one in whom a deep longing has been awakened by the gentle, yet persistent hand of God upon their spirit.

Many of the ancient questions regarding the *what* and *why* of our spiritual lives are beautifully answered in *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*. "Question: What is the chief end of Man? Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." In my opinion, John Piper says it even better, "The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever." Why is it better? Because, the way one glorifies God is by making Him the profound source of one's deepest pleasure. In short, we are called to what Tozer called, "the sweet and mysterious mingling of kindred personalities." Those who enter into such a wondrous relationship find the joy of inter-

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both are anchored in God himself. He is not only the cause of our creation, but he is the purpose of our existence. Via this summary, we not only come to understand the fact of our restless hearts, but we learn why they are so persistently restless and we a restless people. Apart from God, we thrash about desperately trying to cobble together a sense of identity and purpose, struggling to find our place of belonging in this world. We know not who we are, or whose we are, or who we are destined to become. And it is only upon returning to the One who brought forth our hearts from nothing, that we end our grinding search and find rest in the Living God who is both the beginning and end of our journey. Only in him do we find our identity, our purpose, and our destiny. Therefore, Tozer addresses the message of this chapter

dependence and avoid the twin extremes of codependency and independence, both destructive to personhood. Codependence is the sickness of having oneself absorbed into that of another, with the accompanying loss of individuality. Independence is the disease of being so self-absorbed that one creates an illusory world in which there is no room for another, with the accompanying loss of community. Interdependence is the healthy path between the extremes where the individual person is honored as a unique creation of Christ and where the community of persons is celebrated as the unified Body of Christ. Here we find a mutuality of trust and love, and a place from which one can most closely mirror the intimate relationship between the three persons of the Trinity—three unique Persons, all unified in one God.



STANDING AGAINST POPULAR OPINION

God, I know that truth is what You say about a thing. You alone are the wellspring of the true, the beautiful and the good, and Your unchanging character is the absolute basis for truth. But I live in a culture of growing relativism in which people have increasingly abandoned the idea of objective truth. By Your grace, I choose to stand against popular opinion and affirm that Your Word is truth. May I resist the temptation to define truth in terms of my own subjective feelings, a majority vote or pragmatic results. Instead, I want to make choices that are based on sound judgment, knowing that wisdom is derived from Your inspired revelation. Illuminate my path with Your truth and empower me to walk in it. Then I will interpret the obstacles and opportunities I encounter with a biblical orientation.

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