

A.W. TOZER

Compiled and Edited by James L. Snyder

EXPERIENCING THE
PRESENCE OF
GOD

TEACHINGS FROM THE BOOK OF HEBREWS



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group

Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Bethany House edition published 2014
ISBN 978-0-7642-1618-3

Previously published by Regal Books

Printed in the United States of America

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The Library of Congress has cataloged the original edition as follows:

Tozer, A. W. (Aiden Wilson), 1897-1963.
Experiencing the presence of God : teachings from the book of Hebrews /
A. W. Tozer; edited by James L. Snyder.
p. cm.
ISBN 978-0-8307-4693-4 (trade paper)
1. Bible. N.T. Hebrews—Sermons. 2. Christian and Missionary Alliance—Sermons. 3. Sermons, American—20th century. I. Snyder, James L. II. Title.
BS2775.54.T69 2010
227'.8706—dc22

2010023019

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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FOREWORD

As a teenager and a brand-new Christian, one of my earliest and greatest discoveries was A. W. Tozer. From *The Knowledge of the Holy*—still my favorite nonfiction book besides the Bible—to *The Pursuit of God* and *Born After Midnight* and his other books compiled from the editorials he wrote for *The Alliance Witness* magazine, I devoured everything Tozer wrote.

I still go back to those dog-eared pages and marvel at how Christ-centered, God-exalting and no-nonsense Tozer's words remain. What do I mean by no-nonsense? Well, reading some of today's Christian writers, I've been tempted to feel pretty good about myself. But reading Tozer is like asking for a much-needed slap in the face! There should be a sticker on the cover warning readers that they will be pierced by God's Spirit. And isn't that exactly what we need in our noisy, thrill-a-minute, whatever-feels-good-is-okay culture?

Tozer was not only a great thinker and Christ-lover but also a great writer who honed his literary skills as an editor and writer of editorials. His eclectic knowledge is remarkable, and yet his style is concise and pointed. His words flow from a higher source, out of his immersion in God's Word and his own commitment to worshiping God in everything. The result is a power that can at times leave the reader breathless, yet longing for more.

I am convinced that the evangelical Church in the Western world needs A. W. Tozer more than ever. That's why I am so grateful for this previously unpublished work *Experiencing the*

Presence of God. What a pleasure to hear from Tozer on a subject of keen interest: God's manifest presence in the life of His people. It is a much-needed wake-up call for anyone who wants to truly worship God. It left me enriched and challenged.

Tozer is to me a mentor and an old friend. His timelessness and impact on my life is comparable to that of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Neither man has lost an ounce of his original power and anointing, which was so firmly grounded in God's Word and the ministry of His Holy Spirit in their lives.

Tozer's words feed my mind and heart, consistently pointing me toward Christ. By rubbing shoulders with him on the pages of his books, I am led to worship God and am drawn closer to my Savior and King. There is simply no higher compliment I could pay an author.

I thank God for A. W. Tozer, and I look forward to sitting next to him at a banquet on the New Earth, where we will hear directly from our Redeemer. My advice until then is simple: read this book and read everything by A. W. Tozer you can get your hands on. In doing so, you will draw closer to Christ and invest in the eternity that awaits us.

Randy Alcorn
Bestselling author of *Heaven*,
The Treasure Principle and *Safely Home*
Director, Eternal Perspective Ministries

INTRODUCTION

A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERING GOD'S PRESENCE

Throughout the history of humanity, there have been many great discoveries. I am not sure which one we could point to and say, "That is the greatest discovery in the world." But for the hungry heart, there is but one discovery that satisfies it: the discovery of the manifest, conscious presence of God.

This book you hold is an unveiling of Dr. Tozer's greatest discovery: to understand what God's presence in the Christian's life is all about and to experience it. Dr. Tozer is a qualified guide in this pilgrimage.

There are several things you will notice as you go through this book. First, everything that Dr. Tozer writes about is based upon solid, scriptural truth. The major point he makes is that one truth is not isolated from another truth. Isolating God's truth, according to Tozer, is how heresy starts in the Church.

When people begin isolating Scripture to try to make it stand on its own, it is a warning signal that truth will be sacrificed. It is possible to make the Bible say anything you really want it to say. After all, the cults in the world begin with the Bible, and what they do is isolate truth, failing to recognize the

harmony of the truth in God's Word. Often, Dr. Tozer will say something to the effect that it takes all of the Bible to make it the Word of God.

So the scriptural foundation is very important. Many people have taken a sharp left turn somewhere and gone into what Dr. Tozer calls a Christless mysticism. Nothing could be more dangerous than this, which has led to a strange caricature of Christianity in our day.

I think the next thing you should look for in this book is what Dr. Tozer describes as the conscious, manifest presence of God. Many people decry the word "experience." However, unless you have experienced salvation, you have not been born again. And so the plea in this book is for each of us to press on and press in and experience the presence of God.

Are there charlatans along this line? Of course. But we cannot allow some heretic to rob us of truths associated with the Christian life. This basic truth before us is that it is possible for us to know God in a degree of intimacy that is progressive as well as dynamic. The apostle Paul said, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:10). That is the goal and what we are after: to know God in an increasing level of intimacy from day to day.

This book will whet your appetite for some of the deep things of God. I think if Dr. Tozer were alive today, he might be shocked at some of the teaching we hear over the airwaves, especially on television. The deep truths of God's Word are not being expounded in our day on any large scale.

That leads to another theme in this book. Tozer never goes easy on what he refers to as religiosity, or, as the Scripture says, “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Tim. 3:5). One of the things he attacks most viciously is entertainment in the Church. If you are the sort of person who craves entertainment, you may not like what you read. This message is for those who really want to know God in a way that is out of the ordinary.

A word of caution here: You might not always agree with Dr. Tozer. In fact, he would not want you to agree with him on everything. His purpose is not to win you over to his side. We have a tendency in our society to divide ourselves into little religious pigeonholes. Every little pigeonhole has to agree with everybody on everything in that particular group. If you do not agree with everything, then you must go to another pigeonhole.

Tozer thought this idea ludicrous. There are certain fundamentals of the faith to which we all must embrace and adhere, but then, as Tozer would muse, we must always allow room for mystery. So many things in the spiritual realm remain a mystery. Where we get into trouble is trying to define and describe all of the mysteries. Many of us have a Sherlock Holmes complex when it comes to spiritual things. We want to know everything to the smallest detail. This is nothing more or less than religious minutia, and it only feeds Pharisaic pride.

Striving after God and aspiring to know Him are welcome traits. But in all of this, no matter how far we go in our spiritual walk, there will still be mysteries. What Dr. Tozer teaches in this book is how to walk in the mystery of experiencing God's presence.

Included at the end of each chapter is a carefully chosen hymn or piece of poetry that sums up the truth in that chapter. It would be well worth the effort to spend some time meditating on that hymn or poem. Dr. Tozer's practice in his daily walk with the Lord was to spend time in the hymnbook. I know the hymnbook has gone out of style in many churches today, but we cannot afford to miss the rare treasure of some of these old hymns of the church!

Dr. Tozer was not one to continually look back and pine for the "good old days." But neither was he dismissive of the great history of our Christian faith. And nowhere is that history appreciated more than in the words of a good old-fashioned hymnbook. Perhaps his love of hymnody will whet your appetite to explore this rich store of doctrinal truth.

May God enable you in your spiritual journey to experience everything He has for you to experience. And may you come away from this book ready to live in the manifest, conscious presence of almighty God.

James L. Snyder

TEACHINGS FROM THE
BOOK OF HEBREWS

STRIVING TOWARD GOD'S PRESENCE

*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake
in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days
spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things,
by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory,
and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the
word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins,
sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

HEBREWS 1:1-3

In the deep recesses of man's soul lies an overwhelming yearning toward the Creator. This is a common thread through all humanity, created in the image of God. Unless and until that desire is fully met, the human soul remains restless, constantly striving for that which is ultimately unattainable.

To any discerning Christian, it is easy to see that men and women are in an awful spiritual and moral mess today. A person must know where he is before he can comprehend where he needs to be. The solution, however, is not within the scope of human endeavor. The highest ideal or accomplishment of man is to break from the spiritual bondage and enter into the presence of God, knowing that you have entered welcomed territory.

Within every human breast rages this desire, driving him forward. Many a person confuses the object of that desire and spends his or her entire life striving for the unobtainable. Very simply put, the great passion in the heart of every human being, who are created in the image of God, is to experience the awesome majesty of God's presence. The highest accomplishment of humanity is entering the overwhelming presence of God. Nothing else can satiate this burning thirst.

The average person, unable to understand this passion for intimacy with God, fills his life with things, hoping somehow to satisfy his inward longing. He chases that which is exterior, hoping to satisfy that inner thirst, but to no avail.

St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, captured the essence of this desire in his *Confessions*: "Thou hast created us for Thyself and we are restless until we rest fully in Thee." This explains, to a great degree, the spirit of restlessness pervading every generation and every culture—always striving but never coming to the knowledge of the truth of God's presence.

John the Revelator voices something quite similar: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). It is God's great pleasure for us to fully rest in His presence, moment by moment. God created man expressly for the use of His pleasure and fellowship. Nothing in or of this world measures up to the simple pleasure of experiencing the presence of God.

The spirit of restlessness breaking across the sea of humanity testifies to this truth. Our whole purpose as created beings is to utilize our time delighting in the manifest presence of our

Creator. This presence is both intangible and indescribable. Some try explaining it, but only those with a personal, intimate knowledge of God's presence can truly understand. Some things rise above explanation and human understanding, and this is one. Many Christians are filled with good information, but only a few mercy drops fall into their languid soul to satisfy the thirst for God's presence. Too many have never burst into the dazzling sunlight of God's conscious, manifest presence. Or if they perchance have, it is a rare experience and not a continuous delight.

Man's Striving for Altitude

Intimacy with the Creator separates man from all other of God's creation. The great passion buried in the breast of every human being created in the image of God is to experience this awesome majesty of His presence. However, several things stand in the way of man's striving toward the presence of God in personal, intimate familiarity.

The experience of too many people trying to probe the presence of God ends in complete and utter frustration. Longing to be in His presence and actually coming into His presence are two entirely different things. As created beings, man longs for the presence of the Creator, but in himself cannot find it.

Consider the eagle, born to fly. A natural yearning within the breast of the young eagle leads it to mount up on wings and ascend into the sky with a thousand feet of clean air beneath its wings. The eagle may, on occasion, walk on the ground or perch in a tree, but everything about him is designed to fly in the air. If our eagle had its wings clipped, preventing him from flying, he still would have the burning desire to mount up on wings

and ascend into the sky. His ability, however, would be so impaired that he could never lift off the ground. He could not be true to his nature.

Such is the plight of humanity. We are born to ascend into the very environment of God's presence where we belong; but something has clipped our wings, disabling us from responding to the cry from within. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Ps. 42:7). Because man is shut out of the presence of God, he suffers many maladies.

Hindrances to God's Presence

The greatest hindrance, of course, is the fact that God is unapproachable. Sin has created an unmanageable debt for all humanity. The good news, however, is that Christ has paid the debt and bridged that gap to God for all. But there are still at least three challenges that stand in man's way as he strives after God's presence.

The Moral Bankruptcy of the Human Soul

The first obstruction is the moral bankruptcy of the human soul. Man's inevitable striking against the kingdom of God and the moral order of the universe puts him in debt to that moral order and becomes a debt to the great God who created the heavens and earth. This debt must be paid. What the moral conscience of all men requires and cries out for is a fund of merit sufficient to pay that debt. That's why every religion tries to establish this fund of merit but without success.

Religion does it through what is referred to as "good works," resulting in emptiness and a deep-seated sense of guilt that noth-

ing can wash away. But even if such a fund of merit could be achieved, it would not be enough. Pardon must be secured.

What if some lowlife criminal desired to have an audience with the queen of England? Someone with a long-time record of criminal activity desired to stand before the gracious queen and be admitted into her presence.

Such a matter could be arranged, because many have so desired and been welcomed there. But something would have to be done before that criminal could be admitted into the presence of the queen. Nobody could arbitrarily admit a criminal into the queen's presence—could admit someone who by his previous acts jeopardizes the safety of her gracious majesty and all that she symbolizes.

Through the years, many have gone through the legal protocol to prepare them for an audience with the queen. The primary ingredient for entering the queen's presence would rest on a legal pardon. Somebody would have to straighten out all the legal issues necessary to grant a full pardon. The debt would have to be paid. Pardon is a legal act beyond the capabilities of the person being pardoned; it is an outside force putting to rest the criminal's past. That would be the first step.

No criminal could capriciously come into the presence of the queen simply because he desired to do so. It would have to be someone who was yielding allegiance; but that would not be enough either. Even though the government could pardon this man—could strike from the record all criminal counts against him so that there was nothing on the books—and restore his citizenship as though he were a freeborn citizen once more, even that would not go far enough.

Now take this example of a criminal standing in the presence of the queen of England and think about our desire to enter the presence of holy God. The human heart knows that it cannot enter into the presence of God, because it has rebelled against God. There must be something done to make it possible for that rebellion to end and be forgiven. The act of rebellion must be pardoned completely, and the rebel restored to full citizenship in the kingdom of God, to be made a child of the Father.

All of that was done in Christ. But that is still not enough. There is another hindrance.

The Foul Scent of Sin Upon Us

Let's return to the example of a criminal wanting an audience with the queen. Although the man has been fully pardoned of his crimes, and his past has been expunged, that is not enough. Not only must the past be dealt with, but also the present must be attended to. He could not just walk off Skid Row, unshaven and dirty, into the presence of the queen. He would also have to be washed and made fit to stand in the queen's presence. This pardoned man is dirty, smelly and unshaven. Before going into the presence of the queen, he would have to be groomed and cleansed and properly dressed.

If he is to stand in the queen's presence, his present condition and attire must be in complete conformity to her wishes and demands. She sets the standard, and all who come into her presence must conform to it. She never conforms to their standard.

In like fashion, man cannot enter the presence of God with the foul scent of sin upon him. Although the past has been dealt

with, the present condition also must be addressed. The very presence of sinful thoughts, for example, inhibits our approach into the presence of God. The filth clinging to our robe of self-righteousness repulses the pure, undefiled presence of God. Not only do we need a change of heart, but we also need a change of garment. Therefore, we must exchange our filthy garment for the pure robe of righteousness. To come into the presence of God, we must conform in every way to His standard.

In light of this standard, some provision must be made available. Some fountain must be opened in the House of David for sin and uncleanness so that we may not only be forgiven but also cleansed. The blood of Jesus Christ accomplished this stupendous act! This is what Christianity teaches. This is the witness the Church gives to the world. Man's moral conscience, crying for pardon and cleansing before the presence of the great God, has now found it by an event, an act of the eternal Son, who is the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of every creature, upholding all things by the Word of His power (see Col. 1:15-17). He turned aside to do this awful act—this awesome, amazing, stupendous act—by Himself. He single-handedly purged our sins. He alone could do it, so He did it alone.

In other things, Jesus Christ willingly accepted help. When He was to be born into the world, He accepted the help of the Virgin Mary, who gave her pure body to God and brought Him into the world—a man born a babe in Bethlehem's manger. He wept in her arms, nursed at her breast, was taken care of and fed and loved. He accepted the help of His mother. He willingly accepted help from Joseph, His supposed father, a simple

carpenter who worked from sunup to sundown to provide clothing and shelter for his wife and the boy, Jesus.

But in this one area—the purging of man’s sin—the Son operated alone and single-handedly fulfilled all the requirements for man’s redemption. Therefore, the foul scent of sin upon man can be washed and cleansed by the blood Jesus Christ shed on the cross. This standard allows us to come boldly into the presence of God.

The Lost Concept of Majesty

Even those in Christendom have been challenged in their striving after God. Not only our garments, but also our attitudes and intentions need divine purification. We must come into His presence in a way that is worthy of Him.

The present generation of Christians has suffered what I call the lost concept of majesty. This has come about by a slow decline, manifesting itself in our depreciation of ourselves. Those who hold a low value of man have a corresponding low value of God. After all, God created man in His own image. When we cease to understand the majestic nature of man, we cease to appreciate the majesty of God. How did we get to this place?

At one time, many believed the earth was the center of the universe and all the heavenly bodies revolved around it. It was a simple earth and easy to explain, because we go by our sight, and by our sight the earth is still, and everything is traveling around it. Most people believed this until the time of Copernicus and Galileo, who came along in the sixteenth century and taught that the earth is not fixed at all, but in motion around an orbit.

For the most part, people complied with those findings and said, "Then, we're all wrong about anything being fixed. We don't believe in it anymore." So they stopped believing there was anything fixed in the heavens, or at least that the earth was fixed.

The common thought at the time was, "We're riding around on earth's diurnal course. If the earth is not the center of the world, man is the center of God's creation. Surely not only the center, but the top of God's creation." The accepted belief at the time was that man is the top of the world; God made him, and made him in His image.

In time, Charles Darwin came along and taught that man is not the center, the head, the top and the final, finished product of the creation. Furthermore, the earth and all that is in it and on it is not a creation at all; it just happens to be here. It is simply a moving purpose. Man is simply partway up from where he used to be and where he is going to be. Man once moved about in colloidal ooze and crept and sloshed about in the depths of the sea. Then the sun struck him and he took on an eye and became a mudpuppy. He moved some more, and after the passing of a few more million years, he became a bird. Then after that, he became a monkey, and we are on our way, and here we are now. However, we are not where we are going and we are not where we have been. We are not the center of anything. We are simply taking off. We are in motion.

About the turn of the twentieth century, or a little before, the world suddenly drew a deep breath and said, "Can it possibly be that we are struggling upward and what used to be called sin is not sin at all? It is something else. It is simply the residual twitching of the old mudpuppy. The lingering remnants of that which used to be in the man, and little by little, we are purging him out. Look at

that baboon, and look at that college professor. What an amazing difference! Look at him sit there with a dreamy look on his face while he listens to a Beethoven symphony. See how far he's come?"

Yes, he certainly has come a long way. See him two nights later when his wife bawls him out and he turns on her, shoots her, stabs her or walks out on her. He is a human being, too, and not all of his degrees have changed him on any level.

In spite of all this, there were people saying, "Somewhere there's something fixed. If it is not the earth, it is the sun." About this time, Albert Einstein came along and said, "That is not the way it is at all. Nothing is fixed anywhere, not even the sun. The sun is simply another star, and around it has gathered the solar system, but that is not fixed either. It is moving around another star farther out, and then that whole thing is moving around another big one still farther out."

By this time, your head begins to ache, and you say, "Please, leave me alone. I can't take this." All of these postulations have served to take away every idea concerning the majesty of man. You cannot believe any of these things and then look at a man with any respect.

Look at the pictures of our founders and forbears—very dignified old gentlemen they are, but you cannot look on them with respect if you've lost the sense of the majesty of man because God created him. You would see under their sideburns the marks of the mudpuppy gills. And you would realize they are not dignified men made in the image of God at all but had crept up that far, out of the gutter.

This is what this world system wants us to believe, taking away all sense of majesty. You could not possibly respect that which crawled up from below.

A sense of majesty has been lost, and along with this a sense of dignity has disappeared among mankind. This has so permeated our society that it is perhaps beyond reclaiming.

Even Christians suffer with a demoralized sense of majesty. It does not matter whether it is true or not as long as it is funny. We do not care whether it is truth or not if it is said in a cute way that entertains us.

But I believe the Majesty is still in the heavens. This Majesty still sits on His throne before which angels, archangels, seraphim and cherubim continue to cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." When Jesus, who was God by Himself, alone purged our sins, He went back and sat down where He had been through the long, long ages—at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. After He sat down on that right hand, the eternal Son turned to man.

Reclaiming Our Sense of the Majesty on High
Christian leadership today has done so much to hinder the majestic elements of Christianity. Everything must have some kind of a logical, rational explanation. I readily admit that it verges on the impossible to describe in any degree of adequacy the conscious, manifest presence of God. Any lame attempt on my part will crumble in frustrated disappointment. The best I possibly can hope is to put forth my personal experience backed up by scriptural exhortation. My part is only to whet the appetite and then trust the Holy Spirit to take it from there.

Many people like their religion in a nice neat formula—something they can do without much effort or thought. These days everybody has some shortcut into the blessings of God's

presence: “Five easy steps to happiness” or “Ten easy steps to get everything you want from God.” However, there is no nice neat formula for this. Rather, we need to whet the spiritual appetite for that which it truly craves: the presence of God. I know well that if you can explain it, it certainly is not the majestic presence of God.

Most people, unfortunately, would pursue these pages with a sense of curiosity and soon grow bored and turn aside for the titillation of some new thing. Becoming fascinated with some exterior trinket, they soon lose interest in pursuing the presence of God. For those, someone always comes along boasting of some new religious gadget to play with. The poor, undernourished, immature Christian goes from one religious gadget to another, ending up with an emptiness inside that they cannot comprehend.

This book is a small attempt to fan the flame of holy desire toward God. I hope you will catch the passion and press forward to delight in the conscious, manifest presence of God. Thomas à Kempis understood this and wrote, “If you are to live an interior life you must learn to enjoy His intimacy, unhampered by any interruption from the world outside.” He expands this thought in his book *The Imitation of Christ*: “For a man to make real spiritual progress, he must deny himself; a man who has made this renunciation enjoys great freedom and security.”¹

Unfortunately, the world is too much with us, and it has successfully become entrenched upon our inner soul, making it unable to court His presence. The good news is that the heart of man truly hungers for God’s presence and that all of the great barriers prohibiting that striving after God have been overcome in Jesus Christ.

God Is Present Everywhere

by Oliver Holden (1765–1844)

They who seek the throne of grace
Find that throne in every place;
If we live a life of prayer,
God is present everywhere.

In our sickness and our health,
In our want, or in our wealth,
If we look to God in prayer,
God is present everywhere.

When our earthly comforts fail,
When the woes of life prevail,
'Tis the time for earnest prayer;
God is present everywhere.

Then, my soul, in every strait,
To thy Father come, and wait;
He will answer every prayer:
God is present everywhere.

Note

1. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, translated by Ronald Knox and Michael Oakley (New York: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1959).