

A.W. TOZER

COMPILED AND EDITED BY JAMES L. SNYDER

THE FIRE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

DRAWING NEAR TO A HOLY GOD



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INTRODUCTION

No theme was more important to Dr. A.W. Tozer than the presence of God, especially the manifest, tangible presence of God. It dominated Dr. Tozer's ministry and his life. Indeed, a friend of his shared with me a story that emphasizes this.

Tozer was the speaker at a summer camp meeting. He often preached at camp meetings all over the country. In his day he was quite a popular speaker at camps, colleges, and churches.

During this particular camp, Dr. Tozer was scheduled to preach at the seven o'clock evening service. When the time arrived, he was nowhere to be found. They started the service, thinking perhaps he was running late and would come in the middle, in time for his speaking.

Time went by, but Tozer never showed up, and somebody else stepped in at the last minute to preach.

The next morning my friend ran into Dr. Tozer and asked, "Where were you last night? We were waiting for you to speak."

Looking at him, Tozer quietly said, “I had a more important appointment last night.”

Later on, my friend found out what had really happened. After lunch, Dr. Tozer had gone to his knees to pray and to worship God. He got lost in the presence of God and lost all sense of time.



A big concern of Tozer’s was that although most churches he was familiar with believed in the presence of God, few *experienced* the presence of God. That makes a big difference. To experience the manifest presence of God is something that cannot be matched by anybody or anything.

One of Dr. Tozer’s favorite biblical events was Moses coming before the burning bush. Tozer had a tremendous fascination with what Moses experienced there. He also believed what Moses experienced there on that mountain is possible for us today. Of course, not in the same manner. But we can experience the same God Moses experienced.

To Tozer, one of the great effects of experiencing the presence of God is the drastic separation of the believer from the world. Tozer fervently warned against allowing the culture to come into the church. Consider the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego and the fiery furnace. King Nebuchadnezzar was okay with them worshipping Jehovah as long as they worshiped the king and his idol. *What harm could that be?*

This is what we’re hearing today, that we need to bring the world into the church so that we can “win” the world to Christ. Yet Tozer would argue that’s not what Scripture says. The church is to go out into the world and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

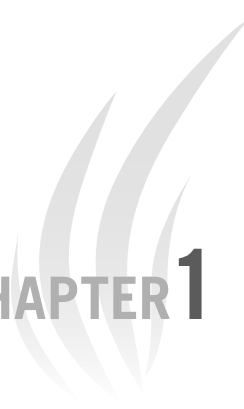
Experiencing the manifest presence of God equips us to go into the world and evangelize. It also equips us to separate ourselves from the world and worship God the way He desires to be worshiped.

One thing Tozer emphasizes is the fact that we cannot determine how we worship God. There are no options for us in this regard. We should worship God on His terms or not worship God at all.

Once we have discovered God and experienced Him, nothing else really satisfies us. That's a good thing.

Let this book lead you up to the mount where the burning bush is to experience God in His fullness.

Dr. James L. Snyder



CHAPTER 1

Moses at the Burning Bush

Then Moses said, “I will now turn aside and see
this great sight, why the bush does not burn.”

—EXODUS 3:3

*O gracious, heavenly Father, coming into Your presence is the
great joy of my life. It is in Your presence, O Father, that I
really discover who I am in Your eyes and what You think of me.
Amen.*

A Sunday school teacher was teaching a lesson on Moses at the burning bush. She explained to the class, “You know, Moses was a great scientist. He was a very observant man. When he saw the fire burning in the bush, his scientific spirit came out and he said, ‘I’ll go and examine this.’”

Nothing could be more wrong than the teacher’s retelling of the story. Moses did initially wonder why the fire wasn’t consuming the bush, but in this book, I am not going to refer to philosophy or psychology in trying to understand what happened to Moses at the burning bush. It cannot be understood, let alone explained, from any human point of view.

Everything in this book will center on theology. What I mean by *theology* is simply *theo* meaning “God” and *ology* meaning “the study of.” Thus, I am referring to the study of God. I want to study God in the environment He wants me to study Him. I will not seek to convey my understanding, which is only human. I want you to experience the fire of God’s presence. It will not be in the same way Moses did, but you and I can experience the manifest presence of God.



Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, I would say that Moses is the best-known person in the Bible and in church history. Nobody carries the credentials that Moses had.

What we will explore in this book is how Moses discovered his identity at the burning bush and how it affected his life.

I am sure fires were not a rare sight in the mountains. What was it about this bush that brought Moses to his knees and let him discover not only God but his own identity?

When Moses approached the burning bush, he was eighty years old (Acts 7). If you remember his story, his first forty years were spent in Egypt, where he eventually rose to the top ruling level. He had quite a future in Egypt. Perhaps he would have replaced Pharaoh. But when Moses was forty, he fled to the mountains after killing an Egyptian who had attacked a Hebrew slave.

Looking at this story, I cannot imagine how confused Moses might have been. He thought he could help his people, the Israelites. He failed in that endeavor, which is why he ran away to hide, thinking his life was really over. But it was in that hiding that Moses found his identity.

I have noticed many times in my own life that God allows me to go in a certain direction that I am not fond of because He has a higher intent in mind for me. God could not do to Moses what was needed to be done while he was still in Egypt. It took forty years in the mountains for God to clean Moses from Egypt's influence and prepare him for what lay ahead.

It would be nice to sit down with Moses one night in the mountains and talk with him. After a few years, perhaps memories of Egypt had begun to fade. I can imagine, however, that as he sat outside on those starlit nights, he was beginning to think he had no real purpose in life.

How many times have we come to that point of discouragement? We try our best, but nothing works. We believe we

have come to the end of ourselves and have no more purpose in life. At the right time and in the right place, though, God will open up a door that was not noticed before. I refer to this as a transforming experience.

Those first eighty years of Moses' life prepared and led him to the burning-bush experience that would not only change his life but all of history.

Moses was a good man in many respects. I believe his life to that point mirrors the majority of Christianity today. We try to do something to please the Lord, and much of what we do ends up in failure. Then comes a long dry period when we think nothing is happening and God cannot use us. We think we are at that retirement stage in life.

No doubt, we are good people and try to do good things. Just as Moses had a passion to serve his people, Christians today have a similar passion to serve. We see it all around. Moses' problem was that he did not know God and he did not know how God wanted him to serve. That is the key issue here. It is not enough to do good things. Anybody can do good things, including non-Christians and atheists, for that matter.

It is not what you are doing, but who is working through you that really makes the difference.

At the burning bush, Moses experienced transformation, and for the first time in his life he discovered his true identity. Those first eighty years were past and served only as a preparation for what was going to happen next.

That is exactly what Christians today need to experience: to come in front of that burning bush and discover their identity from God's perspective.

Everyone has dreams of what they want to do, but our dreams are based only on our limited perspective. How

would our lives change if we had an eternal perspective? How would our lives change if we saw ourselves through God's eyes?

For forty years, Moses stumbled around in the mountains taking care of sheep. I cannot imagine how bored he was. After all, he was a man schooled in all that Egypt's education had to offer at the time. Yet here he is, seemingly doing nothing of real significance year after year, decade after decade. Think of it, if Moses had died at age seventy-nine, nobody would ever have heard of him or known of him today.

What interests me about Moses' story is, God's timing is never my timing and God's place of encounter is never one I would pick. Moses had to submit himself to God in all respects. He had to give up everything and even walk away from his people. This commitment led God to bring Moses to the burning bush.

Who would pick an eighty-year-old man and send him to do the task Moses was sent to do? Our thinking today is that we need young people with energy to do that. However, God's plan seldom coincides with our plans. God's ideas are far above our ideas because we are limited by our human thinking.

When God calls a person to do a work, that person has access to the authority and unlimited resources of God.

After Moses left Egypt, he joined a family in the mountains, married a daughter of that family, and probably thought his life had been settled. The end. What Moses did not know was God was watching him. He did not know how much his life was going to change after seeing the burning bush.

What I hope to accomplish in this book is to better understand Moses' experience at the burning bush. As I said earlier,

not to understand it from an educational or philosophical point of view, but rather from a theological point. I want to try to understand what Moses experienced, how it changed and transformed his life, and how you and I can experience the fire of God's presence, too. If we are truly going to be used of God today, we need to embrace our own burning-bush experience.

All Creatures of Our God and King

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for thy Lord to hear.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou fire so masterful and bright,
Thou givest man both warmth and light!
O praise Him, O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

—St. Francis of Assisi (1181/82–1226) /
William H. Draper (1855–1933)