

# (Men Who Met God): Abraham

by A.W. Tozer

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual experience and living in God's presence, as exemplified by Abraham's encounter with God.*

**Duration:** 36:51

**Scripture:** Genesis 15:1-17, Luke 21:34-36

**Topics:** "Abraham"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of being watchful and prayerful in order to be worthy of escaping the trials and tribulations that will come upon the earth. He questions the belief that once someone accepts Christ, they are automatically saved and will rule over cities with crowns. The preacher uses the example of Abraham, who had a revelation and understood the need to prioritize spiritual matters over worldly pursuits. He warns against being consumed by material possessions and comforts, and urges listeners to seek a personal encounter with God, referencing the vision of John in the book of Revelation.

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## Transcript

I want to read quite an extended passage tonight, which will be the text for the sermon to follow. Genesis 15, and a little of 17 when I come to it later. After these things, the word of the Lord came unto Abraham in a vision, saying, Abraham, fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.

Abraham said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go tireless and scared of my house as Eliezer of Damascus? And Abraham said, Behold, to me dost thou give no suit, and one born in my house is my heir. Behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, This shall not be thine heir, but he which shall come forth out of thine own bow shall be thine heir. And God brought Abraham forth abroad and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number them.

And he said unto him, So shall thy seed do. And Abraham believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said unto him, I am the Lord.

I brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? This man wanted confirmation he wasn't satisfied with Bible teaching. He wanted confirmation in the witness.

Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And then this becomes this awesome passage. God said unto him, Take them hither of three years. And she goeth of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove and young pigeons.

And Abraham took them unto him, all these, and divided them in minutes, and laid each piece one against another. But the birds he divided not. When the powers came down upon the carcasses, Abraham drove them away.

But when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham, and low and poor great darkness fell upon him. He said unto Abraham, Now I have assured thee that thy seed shall be a stranger in the land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they shall serve will I judge.

And afterwards they shall come out with great substance. Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace. Thou shalt be buried in a good old age, but in the fourth generation they shall come hither again.

For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. God stopped speaking, and the narrative begins again. It came to pass that when the sun went down, it was dark.

Behold, a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river of the river Euphrates. We skip chapter 16 and look at 5 verses in chapter 17.

When Abraham was nineteen years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abraham and said unto him, I am the Almighty God. Walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

And Abraham fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham, for a father of many nations have I made thee. Now, I with hesitation preach on this, for I feel myself not worthy to be here at all in these two wondrous chapters, because here is found the beating heart of living religion.

This man, Abram, had no Bible, no church, no religious tradition, no Bible teacher, no evangelist, no hymn book, no Bible school. He had only his empty, hungry heart and God. And here we see the ancient fountain of worship.

This goes back to the roots of true religion, back of all denominations, back of all churches, back of all forms of worship, back of those things we take for granted, organs and pianos and singers and preachers, back of all that. So there was nothing like that then. Here was a man, nevertheless, who met God.

Now, this is every man's judgment and every man's condemnation and every man's hope. And let no man hide behind what he fondly believes and tells others is a religious problem. Father Abraham stands for every man.

He is the father of them that believe. And he had no religious problems, or if he did, he took them straight to God. He said, God, you tell me this.

Now, wait a minute, how about that? God answered him, he talked to God. His religious problems he took straight to God. How many people there are in hell who are there because they fooled themselves into believing they had religious problems, when all they had was sin and no desire to be rid of it? Father Abraham, I repeat, stands for all men.

And this man had an experience with God. He met God in living encounter. You will notice that God stepped over the threshold into Abraham's experience, into his intelligent experience.

Abraham and God met face to face in living encounter, Abraham with a living being he called God. Notice here and elsewhere in the story, the word of the Lord came to Abraham. He didn't take a course in something, but the living, vibrant, audible word of the Lord came to Abraham.

And the Lord appeared unto Abraham, and the Lord went up from speaking unto Abraham. And Abraham said to God, and God said to Abraham. Now, here was experience.

You will notice, I think I've said this before and called attention to it, that I believe in religious experience. I believe in it in full accord with the Christian Church, back to the Apostles and back to our Lord Jesus Christ himself. I believe in spiritual experience.

The trouble with this is that we believe without confirmation. We do not have it confirmed in our hearts. God needs not to confirm anything in himself, because God, being true, cannot lie.

But we need confirmation within ourselves, and we don't get it, and the result is we're very pale, poor, anemic, disappointed and dissatisfied Christians. I believe in spiritual experience, and I love definitions. I've got to be careful lest I bore my audience with definitions, because if I'm talking about one thing and you're hearing something else, I might as well stay at home and so would you.

But if we're going to get together to know what I mean, then you're going to have to have me define a bit. By definition, I give you this, that experience is conscious awareness, conscious awareness. To be aware of something, you can't break it down any further than that.

You are aware of something, that's it, awareness. Then to be consciously aware, not to be asleep or to have it happen in your subconscious, but to be consciously aware, conscious awareness of something. That is, the conscious intelligence, the conscious personality of the man or woman or young person is aware of something.

Conscious awareness of something by somebody. That's the definition, and I'm defining it, defining the definition. Conscious awareness of something by somebody.

Now, what was Abraham conscious of? He was consciously aware. What was he aware of? God. Who was it that was aware? Abraham.

So we have conscious awareness of something by somebody, and I positively defy any theologian or preacher in the world to take that away from the Church of Christ. You have a right to be consciously aware of meeting God. You have that right, the confirmation and inward knowledge, the witness within you.

And when I say this, I am not giving you my personal beliefs about it. They are my personal beliefs, but I mean that I am not interpreting it out of my own personal erratic convictions. This was believed by the

fathers down the years.

There lived a great preacher in the days of the awakening. In fact, God used him to bring about the New England awakening. His name was Jonathan Edwards.

They said of him that he was one of the sixth great intellects. They said that he was one of the most successful men that ever lived. The world said that about him.

And this man, Jonathan Edwards, wrote a book called *The Religious Affections*. And the religious affections in his day meant the religious emotions. And he was a Calvinist now.

He was not a Methodist, he was a Calvinist. He was not a member of the Salvation Army. If he had been a Methodist or a member of the Salvation Army, the fundamentalists might have spiked him and said, Well, he's an Arminian.

He didn't happen to be an Arminian. Wesley was, but he was a Calvinist, a good old John Calvinist. And yet he believed in the religious emotions to a point where he wrote a book in defense of them.

And when they accused him, because there was so much emotion in his revivals, he stood up and defended the fact that when a man meets God, there is an awareness there that lifts his heart to rapture. Now, God, I say, stepped over the threshold of Abraham's conscious experience into his conscious life of awareness. Notice how this affected Abraham variously.

One time Abraham fell on his face and God talked with him. Ah, that's it. Abraham fell on his face and God talked with him.

I don't think that you ever find in the Bible any neat little picture that sums up the right place for Abraham and the right place for man and the right place for God better than this. God on his throne speaking and Abraham on his face listening. That's always the ideal.

God to do the talking and man to do the listening. And in the conscious presence of the world's awful mystery, in the conscious presence of the world's awful mystery, I charge it upon us, my brethren, I charge it upon the modern evangelical Church that we are not consciously aware of a presence. We are not consciously aware of God.

God is twice removed. We hear not God's voice, we hear a recording of his voice. We see not God's face, we see a painting of his face.

We hear not the sound of his voice, we hear an echo of the sound. We are always once removed from God. What is revival? It is when we stop looking at a picture of God and look at God.

When we stop hearing an echo and hear God's voice itself. When instead of having God in history, we have God in experience. The Church now is satisfied with the God of history, the Christ of history.

And we have God in history and Christ in history, but we don't have God in living personal experience. That's why we're so dissatisfied and so empty and we have so little vivid, vibrant joy in the things of God. But here was the man Abraham in the conscious presence of that awful mystery, the world's awful mystery, that someone has called the *Mysterium Tremendum*.

The awful, the awful, the mysterious, the mysterious and tremendous, awesome being, the majestic God who lives in his universe. Now Abraham was lying face down before this awful mystery, this awful one who filled all and who was present and who was pressing in on Abraham and rising above him and defeating him and taking away his self-confidence and overwhelming him and yet inviting him and calling him and pleading with him and promising him and drawing near to him. This is God, beloved.

In our day we have reduced God to where we can get hold of him and manage him and push him about. For the great God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ rises beyond our consciousness and rises beyond our ability to lay hold and rises beyond all of our questions into his infinitude, the mighty great God. And this is the God that approached Abraham, this is the God, this God.

Later on he approached mankind in his own flesh, man's own flesh, and they called his name Immanuel. But all of it was God trying to get to do, God approaching man. And yet this God was the terrible God that made Abraham lie down on his face.

I ask you, what better are we than cattle, as Tennyson said? What better are we than sheep, than sheep that nourish a bland life within the mind? If we live, live and buy and sell and get gain and eat and sleep and marry and propagate and get old and die and never during all this time do we ever meet the God, the God of Abraham, the Mysterium Commendum, the awful majesty that sitteth upon the throne. John said that he was called up hither and he saw a voice, or saw a door open and he heard a voice saying, Come and see, and he came and he saw a throne. A throne was set in heaven and one sat on the throne.

And he that sat was to look upon like a barrel and a jasper stone, a sardine and a jasper stone. And there was a rainbow round about the throne in sight like unto an emerald. And there sitting in awful majesty within the circle of the green rainbow was the great God, before whom the beasts and the elders fell down.

Now I say, what are we better off than the sheep out in the pasture field, if we never sense this, if heaven is silent and the night unpopulated? There that great English poet Wordsworth wrote that well-known and often quoted and badly quoted and misquoted sonnet in which he said, The world is too much with us. He was disgusted and sick in heart. The world is too much with us.

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers. Getting and spending, I wonder if he lives now, I ought to say. Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

Little we see in nature that is ours. We're the orphans of the world. Little we see in nature that is ours.

This moon and this wind that will be howling at all hours, but is up-gathered now like sleeping flowers. For this, for everything, we're out of tune. And then he burst out in a daring line in which he said, Great God, rather would I be a pagan suckled in a queen, yeed outworn.

I'd rather be a heathen without a knowledge of the Bible and brought up in an outworn pagan creed. So that standing on some peasantry I might have visions that would make me less forlorn. That I might see old prophets rising from the sea or hear old Titan blow his wreath at dawn.

And something in my heart responds to the great English nature poet. He said, I'm so sick, I'm so sick of getting and spending and being a pawn of the world and seeing nothing but money and houses and clothes and people. He said, I'd rather be a heathen and stand on the shore of the ocean and imagine I saw Proteus rising or heard old Titan blow his horn.

And at least have something than to have nothing. I'd rather be an Indian stretching his hands toward heaven and calling out to Ditchegumi or some other god. I mean it, I mean it! Than to be a half-hearted Christian coming into church and going out again and going off and reading a chapter and not knowing what's in it and never having a sense of God there.

Full of self-confidence and a soul all clogged up with pride and inventions and food and comforts and things to read and places to go and things to see. So we spend our time running from one place to another, looking at this and running and looking at that, getting old while we're doing it, coming near to the judgment. And Christ warned, what shall a man profit if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? And over here in the book of Luke, Jesus our Lord, and we have his uttered words, his recorded words, I think we ought not to sleep tonight until we've done something about this.

Take heed to yourselves, said our Lord Jesus, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life. So that day come upon you unaware for as a snare shall it come on all in the dwell on the face of the holder. Watch ye therefore and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man.

Where is the teaching? Where is the teaching that everybody that's accepted Christ, he's okay, the Lord will come and we'll all wear crowns and rule over cities. He says, Jesus says, watch ye therefore and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape these things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man. If it was automatic, why should we have to watch and pray? Well, Abraham, back again to Abraham.

You know, Abraham got a hold of an idea, just one good idea, sometimes better than a whole book. Abraham got a hold of one good idea, and it was this, only God matters. Now from the known to the unknown is a good way of reasoning.

You can't get a hold of the unknown until you get a hold of the known. Jesus said, if you don't know the things of earth, how can you believe if I tell you the things of heaven? So let's read a little from the known to the unknown. Let's begin by saying that everything is best when it's fulfilling its design.

Everything is designed for something. You can use a ballpoint pencil for, I don't know, a half a dozen things, I suppose, but it's best when it's being used as a pencil. You can use a piano to stand on to hang a picture if you want to, but that's not what pianos are made for.

You can put pictures on it or a flowerpot if you want to. That isn't what they're made for. They're made to produce music.

That's what they're built for. And they're best when they're doing that which they were designed to do. There's an intelligent purpose in the creating of a piano.

The man who made a piano didn't say, I'm going to make a piece of furniture and use it for anything. It's going to have 19 uses. It has one! And that's to get good music out of it.

And when it comes to us, look at your eye. Your eye just has one purpose. Just one.

It's up there, stuck two of them, stuck side by side, and they're there for a purpose. They are the lenses through which your soul sees, through which your mind takes in the scenes around you. So that's what your eye is for.

And then you have an ear, two of them, stuck one on each side of your head. Now what's your ear for? They're to hear with. Your eye is designed to take one kind of a wave and a pulsation of energy.

And your ear, another. Now you can use your ear to hang glasses on, of course. They're useful.

I've often wondered what we'd do without them. They're that few Scotch tape, I suppose, to hold them on. But here's your ear.

Now your ear is best, your ear is best when it's doing the thing God designed it to do. And so it is with everything else. Everything has a design and a purpose.

And it can be perverted to another purpose. So God was saying to Abraham, now listen, Abraham, I'm trying to get a message through to you. I'm trying to tell you something, Abraham.

Can you listen to me? And here it is. Abraham, you were made in my image, and you were designed for one purpose, and that is to be a retainer at my court, and that is to be a worshiper at my throne, that is to glorify me and live in my presence and rest not day and night through eternity, crying, Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty, and be happy beyond the power of all mortals to understand. That's, Abraham, what I created you for.

Don't forget it. You thought I created you for something else, but you're wrong. This is what I created you for, to worship me.

Do you know, my friend, that's what you're created for. You're first to be a worshiper. That's what God made you for.

God put a harp in your soul, and he's the only one that can get any music out of it. God put that harp there, that image of himself there, that you might take it to him and that he might use it and that he might play on that instrument and bring forth high music to fill all the heavens above. So this is what Abraham had to learn, to glorify God.

Abraham, only God matters, God was saying, and I say this to you tonight, you don't have to come back and listen, but I say to you now, only God matters at last. And if you get everything settled with God, then you get God within the compass of your spiritual experience. He'll untangle everything else.

All problems are spiritual problems at bottom. All problems are spiritual. And if you get God, everything else will iron itself out for you finally.

And it doesn't make much difference whether it does or not, for you've not got a long time to stay around. And the Lord God appeared unto Abraham, and there he built an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him. Now well do I know that the only altar now is the one in the glory where our Lord Jesus Christ is.

Well also do I know that the idea of building an altar and worshiping before an altar is as old as Abram's, and nothing is teased down the years. So when I talk about building an altar, remember I don't mean a wooden altar to which you put your elbows. I mean an altar in your heart.

What does the hymn say? My heart, the altar, and thy self, the flame. Ah, this encounter with God Almighty, this wondrous encounter. You see, God had been there all the time, but Abraham had just now got acquainted with him, really.

And this has been true of every great person, all the great souls, the great Saints. Why is it that we write the stories and the lives of the great men? I've written two biographies, three, I guess, if you count small ones, of great souls, great men who in this generation met God. And they were all alike.

They were different. I wrote the life of A.B. Simpson, the life of Robert Jaffrey, both of them being Canadians, and the life of the Irish plumber, Tom Hare. That, of course, was only brief.

But, you know, they were as unlike as it could possibly be imagined. Dr. Simpson was a cultured, well-educated, trained theologian. Dr. Jaffrey got his training on the jump, and his education wasn't tremendous.

And he was a great missionary. Tom Hare has no education. You think he got inspired by King James Version, you know.

More or less, he knows better. But he says he believes that the Lord exercised a certain something over those translators that he didn't over anybody else, and he may be right of that. But Tom doesn't have much education and knows it.

And he's an Irishman with a red face, so red that if you put a match on the thing, it would burst into flames. You know, just a red hot face he's got. But how different they were, those three men.

But they were alike in one essential. They had all had an experience with the living God. And God had said the same thing to all of them, only God matters.

And if you'll get right with me, everything else will work itself out for you. And they all built an altar. If we had the names of all of them who had been found of God in the waste-piling wilderness and had built the altars, how many would there be, wondrous! Yes, Lord, there would be the great and there would be the small, there would be rich and there would be poor, there would be high-born and low-born, there would be kings and there would be peasants.

But they would all be alike in this, that they met their great God Almighty. And something changed them, and something changed inside of them. And the complexion and color of the universe changed for them.

And they looked out and saw something they had never seen. As the hymn says, something glows in every, where is it, the priceless eyes they have never seen. They saw something different.

They saw these men after they had met God, they looked out upon the world and they saw a different world. And I have heard many a man testify and I have read the testimonies of men that after they had met God in living experience, in living encounter, that they saw that the whole world changed for them. Buddy Robinson, whom I quoted this morning, said when the Lord filled him with the Holy Ghost, he was so blessed he went out and hugged the trees.

He said he grabbed a tree around and hugged the thing. I can understand that. Everything looks good when God is in your heart.

Everything looks good when you see it through the glow of worship and the aura of divine enjoyment. Everything changes. Tell me that Simpson one time was a little late in getting to meeting and a young fellow was sent over to get him.

He got over there and he couldn't go in because the door was partly open and they heard a voice coming out and they were just saying two words and saying them over and over again. The old man was looking up and with his eyes open was saying two words, And it was that saying of Yes, Lord! that made him into the great man that he was. God was on the throne and he was lying face down and God was speaking to him.

And that's the picture we got in Abraham back there in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis. Now that mysterious presence, that fire, that great darkness, that awesome thing that we read about there said that there was a deep sleep fell upon Abram and lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him. It came to pass that when the sun went down it was dark and behold a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passed between those pieces.

And the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram. Here was not only experience, here was experience in fire, here was experience in mystery and majesty and awe and wonder. That feeling of personal nothingness came upon the man Abraham before the object, the object that we call God.

So Abraham was bewildered and confounded and captivated and transported and ravished and fascinated. All this came to the heart of the man. This was what made Abram Abraham.

Now I wonder if you have heard from God. How blessed are your ears if you have, if you are disturbed by this simple little outline I have given tonight. If you are disturbed by it and you feel something in you, how blessed are you for there are thousands like you and just as good and just as wise and just as educated who don't feel a thing tonight.

They don't feel a thing and the way they respond is to say that leaves me cold. Thank God it doesn't leave you cold. Thank God.

I want to know whether you will build an altar. An altar is wherever. There is one altar up there and the Lord the Lamb is there.

But wherever you put your elbows down and lift your face heavenward, there is an altar for you. I want to read a little hymn to you as I bring this to a close. A little hymn and I want you to think of your own spiritual life and say to yourself did I ever meet God at all? Do I know God? Listen to this man as he worships God.

Now you can't sing this hymn. It's irregular in verse form and you couldn't sing it and people wouldn't sing it anyhow because they'd rather sing something else. But this man wrote this.

Oh, blessed Trinity. Holy, unfathomable, infinite. Thou art all life and love and light.

Holy Trinity, blessed equals to thee one God we worship thee. Oh, blessed Trinity. In our astonished reverence we confess thine uncreated loveliness.

In our astonished reverence did you notice how when a man called Immanuel walked in Palestine how he astonished everybody? Not by miracles but by his Just as the man they'd shake their heads and say this is wonderful. We'd never seen anything like this before. Even when he was hanging on a tree and was crucified the hard-hearted and hard-headed Roman soldier fled away and said surely this was the Son of God.

In our astonished reverence we confess thine uncreated loveliness. Oh, blessed Trinity. Oh, simplest majesty.

Oh, three in one. Thou art forever God alone. Oh, blessed Trinity.

Oh, unbegotten Father give us tears to quench our love and to calm our fears. We couldn't sing that without being hypocritical. How many are there in fundamental circles? How many are there in the Christian missionary alliance that have to pray that God will give them tears to quench their love lest it consume them? I find a great difficulty to find enough love to warm my hands at.

But he had to pray that God would quench the fire for fear it would burn him up. Oh, unbegotten Father give me tears to quench us tears to quench our love to calm our fears. blessed Trinity.

Bright Son who art the Father's mind displayed. Thou art begotten and not made. Oh, blessed Trinity.

Co-equal spirit, wondrous Paraclete. Thy deed of Godhead is complete. Here was a man who had met God.

Here was a saint on his knees. He can't sing this carelessly. He couldn't.

Oh, blessed Trinity. In the deep darkness of prayer still at night we worship thee blinded with light. Oh, blessed Trinity.

Oh, would that we could die for love of thee. Incomparable Trinity. Our Father's had this flame.

Where is that flame, that living flame that shone so bright in days of old? We don't have it because we haven't experienced it. We've come in by saying, I accept Christ. We've signed the card, we've joined something, and we've not met God.

For if we have been born again, some of us haven't been well-born. The idea that all Christians are alike is ridiculous. Just might as well say that all babies are alike.

Some babies are born premature and almost die. My brother, eight years younger than I, was born a premature baby, and he had something wrong with his neck. His head was over on one side, and they carried him around on a pillow for days, weeks, I think.

He finally came out of it and became quite an athlete as he got older. Would you tell me that he was born equal to, say, our son, Roland, who bounced into the world hallowing, full of energy and life and health? But my poor little brother was born into the world premature and undersized with his head off on one side, barely able to make a little mewling sound like a kitten. Would you tell me that all babies are born alike? No.

They are born with varying degrees of perfection and energy and life, and so in the kingdom of God. Some Christians are born into the kingdom, barely making ends. Some are born with a bounce, and you hear from them as soon as they arrive.

They cry, Abba, Father, and they fill the church with the sound of their voice. Others may barely get in and hang on the edge until you don't know whether they'll live or not, and they have to be put in oxygen tents in order to keep them alive at all. Here was a man who was well born.

Oh, blessed Trinity, in our astonished reverence, we confess Thine uncreated loveliness. These were the saints who met God. How about you? What's the way in? The way in is by the blood.

There is a way for man to rise to that divine abode in offering in a sacrifice the Holy Spirit's energies and advocate with God so that through the wonder of God's love and goodness, the sons of misery and night can dwell with eternal life through the eternal love. The blood of Jesus Christ is the way in. The safe way in.

The protected way in. The only way in. The door that is sprinkled all around with precious blood.

You can come. You can come now regardless of what your past has been, regardless of how you failed, regardless of how long you've dragged half in and half out, regardless of how many times you promised and how many times you promised and how many promised and how many times you promised and how many promised and promised and how many times you how many promised and had to what you and worked hard to do it. The biggest thing is the heart and the heart is not to say that God had blessed her and that the truth she read would bless her heart.

There's emotion in God's direction here and I rejoice to see it. Now let's follow him. Let's obey.

We're going to stand and sing this song, the seat is wide open here, you come sit down here. Will you do that? While we stand. All right?

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Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/2/SID2139.mp3>

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