

# 'The Act of Worship'

by A.W. Tozer

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*True worship is a continuous and all-encompassing part of our lives, requiring us to have nothing in us that is displeasing to God.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 45:1

**Topics:** "Worship", "Holistic Living"

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## Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the profound importance of worship in his sermon, urging believers to recognize that true worship is an act of admiration, love, and honor directed towards God. He explains that worship must encompass the entirety of one's life, not just a single day or moment, and that it should be a continuous offering of oneself to God. Tozer warns against the dilution of worship through common language and urges a return to the reverence and purity that worship demands. He highlights that worship is not merely a feeling of awe but a deep, spiritual connection with God that requires sincerity and a life aligned with His nature. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a holistic approach to worship, where every aspect of life is dedicated to glorifying God.

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## Transcript

The Act of Worship

Pastor and author, A. W. Tozer

January 16, 1955

Quite a number of years ago, I spoke on the subject of worship. But a new generation has risen in Israel and many of those who were here then have moved to all parts of the country and out of the country. And new friends are with us. I feel that I want to speak again on worship today and emphasize at least some of the same truths which I gave then. This is of deliberate intention and purpose, because I feel that the truth here is too important to neglect.

I want to read that very celebrated, and oft repeated Psalm, or part of it, the 45th Psalm. My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee forever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness. And thy right hand shall

teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, whereby the people fall unto thee. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right scepter. Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above my fellows. All thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made thee glad. King's daughters were among thy honorable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir. Harken, O daughter, and consider and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people in thy father's house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him. Now, those words I want to repeat. He is thy Lord, worship thou Him.

Now the impulse to worship is universal. If there is a race or a tribe anywhere in the world that does not worship, it has not been discovered. And yet the act of worship, for the most part, is so imperfect, so impure, and so far astray, that any word that might be spoken to help us to worship God more acceptably, would indeed be well-spoken.

Now, we want to speak a little of the act of worship and the object of worship. And of course, the act of worship has degrees in it. There are ingredients that make up worship. We worship that which we admire, or rather, we admire that which we worship. We can admire without worshipping, but we cannot worship without admiring, because worship is admiration carried to infinitude, and it is to honor. We can honor the one we do not worship, but we cannot worship the one we do not honor. So, worship carries in it an ingredient of honor.

And then there is a spirit of we call fascination. We can only worship that way which fascinates us. And we are fascinated by the object of our worship. The old poet said in an oft-quoted passage: in our astonished reverence, we confess thine uncreated loveliness. There is an astonishment about reverence. If you can explain it, you cannot worship it. You may admire it. You may honor it. But there is a mysterious fascination that carries the heart beyond itself, and then we are near to worship. And of course, maybe I should have said first, that we love. We can love without worshipping, but we cannot worship without loving. And then, love when it lets itself go and no longer has any restraints, it becomes adoration.

We need a thorough housecleaning, and I don't know how it could be given. And I think it rather could never be given. But we certainly stand in need of refining our definitions a lot. We use such words as honor and love and adore, and yet those words don't mean what they're supposed to mean. We use down on the common level such exalted divine language, that when we try to rise to the exalted and divine level, we find ourselves with a bunch of common-used words that do not express anything. If there were a pope, or some kind of a priest that could decide the use of the English language, I'd recommend that a bill be passed ruling out such words as love and adore and all such related synonymous words, and they would be permitted to be used only in prayer, in Bible teaching, or preaching or in song, because we have spoiled them and made them a common, and yet they belong to God. And worship would seek union with its Beloved. And an active effort to close the gap between the heart and the God it adores, is worship at its best.

Now, the object of worship of course, is God. The old creed said that we worship one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. That is Who we worship. Now, if we could set forth all of God's attributes and tell all that God is, we'd fall on our knees undoubtedly in adoring worship. It says in the Bible here, that He dwells in light that is unapproachable; Whom no man can see or has seen or can see, and who no man can see and live. It says that God is holy and eternal and omniscient and omnipotent and sovereign, and that he has 1,000 sovereign attributes. And all of

these should humble us and bring us down.

I cannot accept with any sympathy, the idea that we go to church to soothe ourselves; that we go to church to calm our spirits. We do calm our spirits and there is a soothing effect in worship, but the primary objective of church attendance is not to relax. The primary purpose of church attendance is to offer worship which belongs to God; unto the God to whom it belongs.

Now, David sees this God incarnated in this 45th Psalm. He sees Him as God of the substance of His Father, born before the world was, and man as the substance of His mother born in due time, a radiantly beautiful, romantic and winsome figure. And here are some of the adjectives he used to describe this Man who is God and this God who became man. He calls Him fair and kindly and gracious and majestic and true and meek and righteous and loving and glad and fragrant.

Certainly, there is not the stern-browed Jupiter or Thor sitting in some high Olympus. Here is a God of fragrant, glad, loving, righteous, a friendly God and yet majestic, dwelling in light that no man can approach unto, striking awe to His enemies and terror to His foes. And this is the God we adore. And here is the Lord, worship thou Him. I think that even announcing that we're going to preach about worshiping God must start the wings of the seraphim in heaven to waving. I think the organs must start to play there, because heaven exists to worship God. And the atmosphere of heaven is, the very breezes that flow out are filled with divine worship.

And the health of the world is worship. And when all creatures, all intelligent moral creatures are attuned in worship, then we have this symphony of creation. But when anywhere there is not worship, then there's discord and broken strings. And when all the full, redeemed universe is back once more worshiping God in full voice; happily, and willingly and out of the heart, then we'll see the new creation and the new heaven and the new earth. But in the meantime, you and I, as belonging to another creation, are called upon to worship God. And it says, He is thy Lord, worship thou Him.

I want to point out also, that worship must be all-entire. I mean by that, that the total life must worship God. The whole personality has to worship God or our worship is not perfect. Faith and love and obedience and loyalty and high conduct and life, all of these must be taken as burnt offerings and offered to God. If there is anything in me that does not worship God, then there is nothing in me that worships God perfectly. I wish you might jot that down at least in the back of your memory and think it over. That if there is anything in me that does not worship God, then there is nothing in me, that worships God perfectly.

I do not say that God must have a perfection of worship or that He will not accept any worship at all. I would not go so far if I did. I would rule myself out. And we would all hang our harps on the willows and refuse to sing the songs of the Lord in a strange land. But I do say that the ideal God sets before us is that we should worship as near to perfectly as we can. And that if there are areas in my being that are not harmonious and that do not worship God, then there's no area in my being that worships God perfectly. There is a great delusion among religiously inclined people these days; it is that we imagine that a sense of the sublime is worship.

I happen to be reading again or trying to read, I find it hard going, not because it's profound, because I don't agree with it, a book called "Nature Mysticism," written by some old fellow with a DD. He should have known better than to write that book, but he did. I'm trying to read it. And it talks about the sublime, but it doesn't talk about Jesus nor God nor the blood nor the Incarnation, but always the sublime. And we're supposed to walk out under the stars and feel a sense of sublimity, like a crackpot poet. And that's

supposed to be worship. I do not believe it, Sir. A man utterly corrupt, crawling with the maggots of iniquity, when the great thunderstorm breaks on the mountain, or when the sea and the storm booms on the shore, or when the stars in their silver beauty shine at night, that man feels a sense of sublimity.

When you walk into a cathedral where the candles burn fitfully, all bank upon bank, and where there are sections that you can't enter. The sign says please do not enter the sanctuary. That throws over some people a sense of awe and sublimity. Now awe and sublimity are ingredients of worship if their worship is there. But we can be awestruck and not worship God. We can sense the sublime and not be worshipping God. There are poets whose faculties for the sublime were developed far beyond yours and mine. And yet who dared to write that there was no God.

I think of Lucretius the Roman poet and his great, great work on the nature of things. Why he launches into beautiful passages. He was a man in rapport with the universe without any doubt, but he was flatly against belief in God, and I believe, in any gods though he were a Roman. A man who doesn't believe in God, can't worship God. But some sissified mentality might say, now just a minute, don't be so severe dear brother. Maybe we worship God and don't know that we worship Him. Well, if you take the Bible for it, we have to say such a thing is an impossibility. You cannot worship a God at the same time you do not believe that God exists.

So, all this sense of awe that we feel in the presence of nature, or in the silence of the night. All that is natural, but it's not spiritual. It can be spiritual. A man filled with the Spirit and who has met and encountered God in living encounter, can worship God in the silence and in the storm. Spurgeon preached a great sermon on God in the silence. I haven't read it, but I understand it's a great sermon. He couldn't preach any other kind, on God in the silence, and then God in the storm. It's all true. The heart that knows God can find God everywhere. But the heart that doesn't know God can feel the emotions of nature worship without rising to spiritual worship at all.

So I repeat, Sir, that no worship is wholly pleasing to God until there is nothing in us displeasing God. Now, if this discourages anybody, I do not apologize. I think that what we need is discouragement. I think some of us need to be discouraged in order that we might get straightened out. A little boy playing with blocks or running around the house believing that he's Hopalong Cassidy. That little boy, that little boy may do that up to ten, or you may be even twelve if he's a bit slow. But if when he's eighteen, he's still running around with a Hopalong Cassidy hat on, somebody needs to disillusion that boy and say: Sonny, you are not Hopalong Cassidy at all. You just think you are. Now, it's alright for the little ones, and I like to see it myself. I get a grin when I walk down the street and some fellow gets down behind a hedge and says, die, I've got you. Well, he's Hopalong Cassidy. But if he's eighteen and still thinks he's Hopalong Cassidy, he doesn't need consolation, he needs to be disillusioned.

And, if in the twilight of the race, men worship the sun and the stars. If in the twilight of the world, men got down on their knees and prayed to the bushes and the trees and the mountain peaks. That was one thing, but we're not now in the twilight of the race. We are now at full maturity. And Christianity and Judaism have been in the world now for thousands of years. And science and philosophy and education and progress have surely brought us to a point where at least we're able to know we're not Hopalong Cassidy. We ought to have gotten by that even if we're not Christians at all. So, I think instead of consoling men who believe they're worshipping God when they're not, we ought to disillusion them and show them they're not worshiping God acceptably.

What are we to do? Well remember one thing, there is no magic in faith nor in names. You can name the name of Jesus a thousand times, but if you will not follow the nature of Jesus, the name of Jesus will not mean anything to you. We cannot live after our nature and worship after God's nature. We cannot worship God and live after our nature otherwise stated. It is when God's nature and our nature begin to harmonize, that the power of the name of God begins to operate within us. And the power of the name of Jesus begins to move us as it was said so quaintly, that the Spirit of God moved him betimes in the camp of Dan.

And as old Samson was moved to betimes in the camp of Dan, I believe that God's people ought to be moved to betimes to true worship. But we can never be. We cannot pray toward the East and walk toward the West and then hope for harmony in our being. We cannot pray in love and live in hate and spite and grudge, and still think we're worshipping God. No, sir. If in the olden times there had been rubber, suppose. Let's take a grotesque, upside-down illustration that nobody else would use. Let us suppose the old high priest in the old days, who took incense into the Sanctum and went back of the veil and offered it to there. Let us suppose that there had been in those days, rubber. It was there, but they didn't know what to do with it. I choose rubber as the worst smelling thing I can think of at the moment when it burns.

And let us suppose that bits of chipped rubber had been mixed with the incense. So instead of myrrh and aloes and cassia and the sweet-smelling myrrh and puffs and ringlets of white smoke going up to fill all the area around about with sweet perfume, suppose that there had been the black, angry, rancid smell of rubber mixed with it. How could a priest worship God by mixing with the sweet-smelling ingredients, some foul ingredient? That would be a stench in the nostrils of the priests and people.

So how can we worship God acceptably when there's that in our nature, that when it catches on fire, gives off not fragrance, but a smell? How can we hope to worship God acceptably, when there is that in our nature: undisciplined, uncorrected, unpurged, unpurified, which is evil and which will not and cannot worship God acceptably? And even granted, which is a strain on my faith, even granted that a man with evil ingredients in his nature, might with some part of him worship God half acceptably, even grant that. What kind of a way is that to live?

And I would say again to you, Sir, and I hate to say this, really. Believe it or not, I would like to be decent. Believe it or not, I would like to be nice. And if I could, I'd join Norman Vincent Peale and thinking about roses and symphony orchestras, but I can't join the good brother, so I have got to tell you that if you do not worship God seven days a week, you do not worship Him on one day a week. There is no such thing known in heaven as Sunday worship, unless it is accompanied by Monday worship and all down the line.

Too many of us discharge our obligations to God Almighty in one day. Usually one trip to church, sometimes nobly, we make it two trips to church. But it's all on the same day when we have nothing else to do, and that's supposed to be worship. I grant you, sir, that that is true worship provided, on Monday and Saturday, they were also worshipping God. I don't mean being in church. Uh ah. You can worship God at your desk. You can worship God on an elevated train or driving in traffic. You can worship God washing dishes or ironing clothing. You can worship God in school. You can worship God on the basketball court. You can worship God in whatever is legitimate and right and good.

So, I do not say that you must be at church all the time. How could you be? Our Lord Himself went up to the synagogue or the temple as His want was on the Sabbath day. Other days, He had been a carpenter and worked and shaved and sawed and driven nails with His supposed father. And like the Jew He was, He went one day a week and worshiped. And certain other times, He went for a whole eight days at a

stretch, but he went only one day out of the week to worship in the temple. So that's all right. We can go to church and worship. But if we go to church and worship one day, it's not true worship unless it is followed by worship six days after that, until the next Sabbath comes. So, we must see to it now my listening friends, my brothers and sisters. We must see to it and we must never rest until everything inside of us worships God.

I think God has been saying something to me. I get on a plateau every once in a while. I seem to have learned all I can learn and have risen as high as I can go. Not all there is to learn, but I think my capacities filled for the time being. Then I don't make any progress. And then I beat the air and then God will do something for me, and I'll have a new, a new, I take a new level.

I think I've taken a new level recently and I'll share it with you. I have been thinking about how important apart my thoughts are. And I have been thinking that I can get under awful conviction from just thinking wrong. I don't have to do wrong to get under blistering conviction and repent. I can lose the fellowship of God and the sense of His presence and a sense of spirituality, by thinking wrong. And God has been saying to me, I dwell in your thoughts. Make your thoughts a sanctuary in which I can dwell. See to it. You can't do anything with your heart. That's too deep, but you can control your thoughts.

And so, I've been trying to make my thoughts right. And when I thought of people that didn't like me, or I didn't like, I have tried to think cheerfully and charitably, in order that God could dwell in my thoughts. God won't dwell in spiteful thoughts. He won't dwell in polluted thoughts. He won't dwell in lustful thoughts. He won't dwell in avaricious, covetous thoughts. He won't dwell in proudful thoughts. He will only dwell in meek and pure and charitable and clean and loving thoughts. Positive thoughts, certainly, aggressive thoughts, fighting thoughts, if need be, but pure thoughts and thoughts that are like God's thoughts. God will dwell in that as a sanctuary.

Your theology is your foundation. The superstructure is your spiritual experience built on that foundation. But the high-bell towers where the carillons are, those are your thoughts. And if you keep those thoughts pure, the chimes can be heard: holy, holy, holy, on the morning air. So, I want my thoughts to be towers and basilicas and bell chambers and chime chambers where God can dwell. I share that with you. How perfect I have managed to do that. I'll wait and see. But at least it's something positive that I want to do, make my thoughts a sanctuary where God can inhabit.

So, see that you do that. And don't let any of the rest of your life dishonor God. See to it that not a foot of ground is unholy. See to it that there isn't an spot nor an hour nor a place nor a time nor a day nor a location that isn't consecrated and given over to God. Then you will worship Him and He'll accept it, allows accept it. And the beautiful thing is, He'll be accepting it when you don't know it's arising. He'll be smelling the incense of your high intention even when the cares of this life have you pretty well snowed down and busy. Even when the telephone is jangling and appointments to be made and people to see and all the rest, keep you from thinking too much about God. If God knows your intention is to worship Him with every part of your being, God will be smelling the incense of your holy intention, even if the world for a time claims your interests, legitimate interests. For God says we're to take care of our family. And the man who won't work and take care of his family, says the Scripture, is worse than an infidel.

So now, how do we attain it? We come to all this by cooperating with God. On God's side is love, grace, atonement, promises, the Holy Ghost. On our side, determination, seeking, yielding, believing. And our hearts can then become chambers, sanctuary shrines, where a continuous, unbroken fellowship of

communion and worship is rising to God all the time. And they worship God in the temple day and night without ceasing. Do you think that means that they never did anything else except repeat songs? No. Their presence was worship. Their attitudes were worship. Their thoughts were worship. They worshipped even when they were doing some legitimate thing, flying on swift wings to help an apostle. They worshipped Him nevertheless, day and night in the temple.

So, you can do your work, marry, and bear children and rear them and send them to school and suffer them through. And you men can take your jobs and worry over them and trust God and go ahead and get old and at the same time, your whole life can be a fragrant altar of worship that God is pleased with even when you're embroiled with and engrossed in earthly activities. I think that's a wonderful truth. And I gave something like it, I say, some years ago and deliberately bring it to you this morning. That the new generation of worshipers might hear it and new friends might. And you that have stayed by this stuff since way back in the 20s, you wouldn't mind, I'm sure, hearing it again. Because in spite of my intention to say about the same thing as I said before, I ended up by preaching a different sermon.

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