

This One Thing I Do

Pastor and author, A.W. Tozer

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Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God and Christ Jesus. And I want to select this without doing violence to the rest of it. But selecting this: Brethren, this one thing I do.

Now, I think that it is quite agreed everywhere throughout Christendom, now called St. Paul; Paul, the apostle, was the most successful Christian that ever lived. That is, he put more in and got more out and did more good and served more nearly to the fullness of his capacity and succeeded in being what a Christian ought to be to a degree, probably not approached by anybody else that ever lived.

And I would not be guilty of picking out one statement from the lips of the man Paul and saying this was the secret of his success. I am not sure that anybody will ever be able quite to discover the secret of his success, but I would say at least this much, that if Paul had not said this that I have read this morning, no matter what else he was, he could not have been the great soul that he was. Paul's statement, this one thing I do--five simple words--this one thing I do, if they are not the key to his success, they are at least so important that without them, there could have been no success.

Now, Paul narrowed himself down deliberately. And the living question before every Christian is, what is important? When Paul said this, one thing I'd do, he meant, there is one thing which, in the light of who we are and what we are and who God is and what God is, our relation to God in His to us, there is one thing which is of exclusive importance, vital and excluding all others. And now the question comes to us and Him, what is important to us?

Now, for all of us, I'd like to say that there are a thousand things that you might do. I'm talking about Christians now of course and to Christians only. I'm talking to those who know God, who are renewed by the Holy Ghost. There are a thousand things that you may do, but you have time for only one. And the trouble with us in America is, we go too many places. We have too many things. We see too many things. We hear too many things. We can buy too many things. And in every way, we load ourselves down with things. And you have time really only to do one thing. And then the question, what is that important thing?

Now, I would recommend to all young people that you don't waste your time fooling with incidentals. The world is full of incidentals. I've been a great admirer always of Robert Louis

Stevenson. But he said one thing. Maybe because he said it for children is why he said it, certainly it isn't grownups. He said, the world is so full of a number of things that I think we should all be as happy as kings. Well, I am not a poet, but I should like to change that around, and ignoring the rhyme. The world is so full of the number of things that I wonder we're not all as crazy as loons. There are too many things in the world and we're busy creating new ones all the time.

Now, we have an answer and you will find an answer, and it's a relatively easy thing, when a man stands to speak in the Spirit, to brush him off, just brush him off. That's a relatively easy thing to do. But we're Christians, and as Christians, we are answerable to God. And so I recommend that you don't waste your time fooling with incidentals. For the world is full of incidentals. The world is full of things that have no more, that do not minister any more to your holiness than the chrome on your automobile ministers toward your travel.

You know, the purpose of an automobile is to take you somewhere. Where you can put all kinds of beauty spots on it, paint it any color of the rainbow, and load down with 40 pounds of shiny metal. But that is incidental, and you are paying for incidentals. You can do that. That's perfectly all right for you, go ahead, but it doesn't add anything. It doesn't get you there any quicker. It doesn't get you there any safer. It is just trimmings on the cake.

And so, life has its certain vital, beating, throbbing heart. And then all around that, man and the devil have placed a thousand shiny things and they want you to get interested in them. But I recommend that you watch it and find out what is incidental and what is fundamental and then work the fundamental for all that it is worth.

Now, the man with a cross can only do one thing. The man with a cross is only doing one thing. Jesus bore His cross out to the hill. He was only doing one thing. The man with a cross only has one plan and he didn't make it. It was made for him by somebody superior to him. And the man with a cross on his shoulder in this country, now, today, in this church, can only do one thing. He only has one plan and he didn't make it. Someone else made it for him. The Man who bore the first cross, or the first Christian cross that went out to the hill with the first cross on His shoulder, that man makes your plan for you. And if you want to escape the tragedy of waste, you're going to have to find out what is important and what is not important. What is fundamental and what is incidental.

Now, every Christian should learn what is important, because you'll have invitations to give your time and strength to a bewildering multitude of activities. You will be invited as a Christian, mind you, and in the name of religion, to do a thousand things, and 999 of those things won't be worth your trouble. They'll be religious, but they will not be worthwhile. You must pray for heavenly wisdom to enable you to eliminate the incidental and recognize the fundamental and work the important thing for all it's worth. Paul did this.

But this will narrow me, somebody says. This will limit me. This will make me narrow and small. I've got to be cultured. I have got to expand. I've got to become cosmopolitan. I got to be big and broad. Well, you'll never get so big and broad but what four feet one way and six feet the other will take care of you. Keep that in mind, always everybody. You'll never get so big nor broad nor expansive, that they don't have little boxes down here that will contain you at last.

And then the next place. This doesn't narrow anybody, or if it does, it narrows them in the right way. You know, you have to be a specialist now in the day in which we live. There was a time when a man could learn about everything there was to know. Aristotle was supposed to know about everything that could be known in his day. But so vast has the body of knowledge become that nobody can know even the beginnings, the first low percentage of all that can be known. We've got to specialize. Scientists specialize. They don't pretend to know anything outside of their field more than just what the average man knows. But within their field, they try to know all they can. And that field has another field within it. And that field has another field, so that, the men who are doing anything in any sphere, are the specialists. And the specialists are the narrow persons, the persons who have deliberately laid aside, the unessential in order that they might specialize on the essential.

Abraham, for instance, was a specialist. Abraham believed God. Abraham obeyed God. And when he got up and left Ur of the Chaldeans and started for the land of promise, the land which God said He would give to him and his descendants after him, Abraham became a narrow man, a very, extremely narrow man. But would you change it? Would you go back and have Abraham interested in real estate in Ur of the Chaldeans? Would you have had him run a scissors-sharpening shop around the corner? Would you have had him be mayor of Urville? Would you have had him stop and expand himself and enlarge himself and join this or that lodge and another two or three other societies and lay cornerstones and be around to sign requests? Would you have had Abraham do this? If you would, then you'd take Abraham out from being the father of the faithful and the father of the Messiah. And you'd have made him into one more man to lie and gather mold in some rocky cavern in Ur of the Chaldeans. Abraham did one thing, he obeyed God. He did what he was told to do and became the great man that he was.

And then there was David. David was a man who could do I suppose, as many things as the average man. I won't go into it. But I think a book could be written showing how versatile David was. How he was a poet and a soldier and a king and a lawmaker or at least an administrator. And in many ways, David could have done many things. And yet, David specialized. David was a worshipper of God, that was first. And the things that he had to do, he melted them down and poured them into this one crucible. They all belonged in one thing. Everything David did ministered to this one thing.

And take our Savior Himself, He set His face like a flint to go up to Jerusalem. He could have done many things, but He only did one. They're trying to make out that Jesus could have been or would have been this or that, but Jesus was only one when He came to this world. He narrowed himself down deliberately.

And so did the man Paul. Think of what this mighty brain could have done. Think of it. This mighty Paul. But Paul said, this one thing I do. I forget the things that are behind and I press forward toward the mark. I tried to be Christ-like. I tried to show forth Christ and put my flesh under my feet and be a Christian. That is my one thing. The one thing that I do.

Well, was Moses narrow? Would you have Moses change? Would you have gone to Moses and told him that he was too narrow? Would you have gone to David and told him that he was too narrow? Would you go to Jesus and say, Master, we're sorry, we don't like to criticize, but we think that You could well expand. You might, for instance, have a better public relations committee and you could get on better with Herod and with Pilate. You can do far better than you're doing if you only had hired somebody to get your name in the press in the right way.

We could have changed Jesus, I suppose, if we can theoretically think so. But of course, we could not have changed Him because He was doing one thing. And so was the man, Paul, and so was every great soul down the years. I suppose the complaint of every sword that ever has been sharpened has been, you're making my edge so thin, I'm so narrow. I'll be criticized for being narrow. But it was the very narrowness of the edge, the very fact the edge is so narrow that it couldn't be measured that made it the terrible, sharp thing that it was and is.

Now every church has got to learn what is important. Churches of Christ are so busy doing things that aren't important that we're scattering ourselves all over the world. And we have never learned the meaning of Paul's words, this one thing I do. The Word of God answers the question, what does this church exist for? Well, it exists to evangelize and to perfect the saints and to do good unto all men. That's what it exists for.

Other things exist for other things. And they have a right to exist in this complicated world we live in. There are literary societies. There are scientific societies. And there are societies of every sort. There are institutions of every kind. There are organizations dedicated to a thousand things and there are legitimate things. And in this mixed up and confused sin-cursed world in which we live, I suppose that we have to have them, at least we think we do.

But the church of Christ is another organization altogether. She's more than an organization. She's an organism. She was born for one thing. She's made for one thing and the one thing she's made for, is to spread the gospel message and tell the story of the redemption in Jesus' blood and see to it that it gets out just as far as it can.

I had quite an interesting experience yesterday. A nice little lady, a cultured, lovely little lady who said she'd been the wife of a Methodist preacher for 45 years. And she's now the secretary of the missionary guild of some Methodist church, and she came to see me. She called up and wanted to know if she could. She said she wanted a letter to write on missions. She takes the Alliance Witness and she wanted to know whether I would write her a letter which she could send out to her guild or group. And I said, well, I don't know why you couldn't do it. Oh, she said, you could do it so much better. She didn't know how she overestimated. But anyhow, she came over here after the broadcast and I talked with her about a half an hour, then I sat down and typed out a letter for her.

And I used this which appears in the Alliance Witness, not written by me, that says we are losing the race, that all the missionaries in the world can only reach a certain limited number of people each year. And yet, people are being born into the world, many millions more are being born into the world each year than can be reached by all the missionaries in the world a year. Therefore, plain, blunt, downright cold, hard figures show that there are more people being born than are being reached. And therefore, with all the missionaries in the world of all Christian denominations and societies in the world working full time, we're still losing the race to the devil. And there are fewer Christians per capita in the world every year. Every time the bells ring to announce the arrival of a new year, there are several million more people in the world, many million more people in the world. Only a few have been reached and the Christians that have been made.

Now, when we say "reach" understand, we only mean approached. We don't mean "won." No, no, no. If you could win millions every year, we could take the world for Christ. But reaching them with the gospel is one thing, winning them to Christ is another. And so there are only a few Christians, relatively, and the percentage gets less and less every year. Therefore, my friends, you may be assured of this, that every year when the bells ring out the old and ring in the new, the world is less Christian than it was one year before. Now that's just plain, cold, hard facts. I wrote that into that letter and signed it. And the dear little lady said, here take this \$10 Oh, no, no, I said, I wouldn't take \$10. She said take it and give it to missions. So, I turned it in this morning, for missions.

Well, my friends, I mention this because the church isn't doing what she has been sent to do, you see. She's supposed to do one thing, but she's doing a thousand things. She's being told what to do by politicians, boy scouts, women's guilds, learned societies, schools, and a whole dozen others you could name. She's being told what to do. And the poor preachers don't know any better than to give themselves to it. The ministerial office is becoming corrupted. And preachers have become general utility men. And the bought and paid for flunkies of the pulpits these days, they'll get behind anything at all, if somebody comes starry-eyed and says, Reverend, I'd like to have you give this a push.

So, we forget that the church of Jesus Christ is a unique, a peculiar organization; an organism something as peculiar and as unique as an angel in heaven, and more so because there's only one church and there are many angels. So, we are born to see that the message gets abroad.

Then, to perfect the saints. Now, that's all a part of the one thing we do, the perfecting of the saints, to teach the Word, to worship the Lord, to learn to live together in love. Learn to live together, worship God, and perfect the saints, teach the Word. All this is in the one thing the church is to do. And to do good unto all men and giving to the distressed and relieving the pains of men wherever it's possible, and binding up the brokenhearted and bringing help to the needy. This the church was sent to do. Jesus Christ was anointed by the Holy Ghost and went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil.

And this going about doing good is a part of the work of the church. It is that one thing, to spread the message, to become Christ-like, to build up her members to become Christ-like, to learn to worship the Lord, to press on toward the beauty of holiness, and to do good all the way as she goes. This is the work of the church. And when she goes astray from that, she forgets the reason for her existence.

Now, if we do this, we shall save ourselves a world of vain effort. And we shall conserve instead of waste our limited resources. Don't forget, though you have all of God for your resources, yet here below, your resources are limited. What do I mean? I mean your strength is limited. I mean your intellectual ability is limited. I mean, your time is limited and my time and my intellectual ability and my strength. We must sleep so much. We only have so much money. We only have so much time. And the leaves of life keep falling one by one, and the wine of life keeps oozing drop by drop. And the bird of time is on the wing and has a little way to fly. And we don't have much time. Our resources are limited. Jesus recognized that when he said work while you have today because the night cometh when no man can work. They had a limited a number of hours in the day and Jesus said you better use them while the sun is shining, so when the darkness settles, there will be nothing you can do.

So, I say that if we narrow down and take Paul's word, this one thing I do, go to the New Testament, find what it is and do it with all our might, we will save ourselves the tragedy of wasted, wasted lives. And we'll win the Lord's "well done" in that day when "well done" will be worth more than all the gold of Ophir. One by one by one by one, our people leave us and go. One by one, God's children step over the river, one by one. And that well done will be worth more than all fame and all knowledge.

You see, our trouble is my friends, we have too much. The trouble is we have too much money. And we get something and that suggests something else, and that suggests something else. Then

we say, sure, we can afford that. And that suggests something else, and then we get that. And we say yes, that'll enable me to do this. And then we do that and that what's our appetite to do something else. Instead of getting and doing satisfying us, the ear is not satisfied with hearing nor the eye with seeing as the Holy Ghost said in the Old Testament. And as Shakespeare said, ambition is a beast that grows, whose appetite grows with feeding. And the more it eats, the hungrier it gets. And that's where we are in America. We're in a place where we can afford so many things and afford to go so many places and do so many things, that our appetites are growing on what we feed it. But there will be a day when this one thing I do will echo in our ears.

When I talk to some people, simple people, older people, people who have no income anymore, when I talk to them, I feel very, very bad. When some simple old person sees me and tells me of the \$3 she could save out of her allowance, or the \$7.50 that she sent to Billy Graham, the \$3 and a half she managed to get off to Fuller, and the \$13 last year she managed to give to missions. I don't mean this church, people, but I mean where I go here and there. Simple-hearted people with shining eyes wanting to do the will of God, but having nothing. When I think of how we, God's well-to-do people, waste our money. When I think how we waste our time and then I think how we fail to sharpen up and narrow down. What a tragedy it is.

And I wonder if in that great day, the widows with their mites and the little ladies with their three and a half, which they bring wrapped up in brown paper, won't mean more in the eyes of Him who judges according to every man's inner conscience. I wonder if it won't mean more. It's a simple matter to throw \$100,000 check in the offering and take it off the income tax. Men do that everywhere, then go out and get in their Cadillac and drive off.

My brethren, to narrow down to a point where our spiritual lives are as sharp as a sword blade, narrowed and selective and sharpened, doing one thing for Christ and doing it well and doing it in His name, and doing it in His power. That's what makes a Christian great. That's what made Paul great, one of the things. And that's one thing we'll wish we'd had in the great day when He sees to us.

Now, I asked you only a couple of questions. Dare we bring our waste to the communion table? Dare we Americans, who respect nothing and respect nobody, who call our president Ike and now his wife, Mamie, who know everybody's first name and give the preacher a nickname. We who know no reverence, no respect. Dare we bring our cheap carelessness into the holy place. Dare we bring our waste to the communion table and take the bread and the wine as carelessly as we would accept a lifesaver from a friend who handed it out to us.

My friends, Paul said, I do one thing. Whatever you do, I do one thing. I do one thing. Sometimes when I write something to the effect or say something to the effect as I did last week in Pittsburgh, that preachers ought to do one thing. Somebody will write me as somebody did, and say, don't you

think preachers ought to do this and this and thus and that and the other? The man who wrote it said, I'm a little man--he's an old man too--and what I say doesn't amount to very much. I'm not very well known. But I'd like to just say that I think that you're making it too hard. Preachers ought not to narrow down so. Why must he say, I'm a little man and nobody knows me. Why, must he say my work hasn't been very great. I've not done much. Why, it's contained within his own argument. He's done too many things to do anything well.

Dare we bring our wasted life to the communion table? Dare we bring wasted hours? Dare we bring wasted money? Dare we bring wasted years to the communion table? But thank God for the cheerful knowledge that here around our Father's table is mercy, and here is forgiveness, and here is cleansing. Nothing you have done in the past can keep you from the Lord's communion table if you're ready to do what you should in the future. All God wants to know is the past is past and by-gones are by-gones. All he wants to know is that you're not going to live as you have lived. You're going to live as you should live. Then you can bring your wasted life, and you can bring your scattered, fragmentary, tattered life to the Lord and there's mercy there and forgiveness and cleansing. And by the blood of Jesus and the Word of His everlasting testimony, you can and dare this morning believe that you're delivered and cleansed, and you can start life over. This first day of the week can be the first day of your life. This first day of the week can be the first day of a new life. Yesterday, the last day of last week can be the last day of a wasted life. And this morning, you can start all anew. Grant it to be so, Lord. Grant it to be so. Amen.