

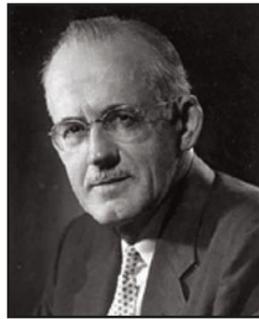


The Powers That Shape Us

by A.W. Tozer

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Fortunately for all of us, human nature is not fixed but plastic. Every human being is in a state of becoming, of passing from what he was to what he is to be. And this is as true of the Christian as of every other person.



A.W. Tozer

The new birth does not produce the finished product. The new thing that is born of God is as far from completeness as the new baby born an hour ago. That new human being, the moment he is born, is placed in the hands of powerful molding forces that go far to determine whether he shall be an upright citizen or a criminal. The one hope for him is that he can later choose which forces shall shape him, and by the exercise of his own power of choice he can place himself in the right hands. In that sense he shapes himself and is responsible at last for the outcome.

It is not otherwise with the Christian. He can fashion himself by placing himself in the hands first of the supreme Artist, God, and then by subjecting himself to such holy influences and such formative powers as shall make him into a man of God. Or he may foolishly trust himself to unworthy hands and become at last a misshapen and inartistic vessel, of little use to mankind and a poor example of the skill of the heavenly Potter.

To any who might object that we cannot fashion ourselves, that God alone can fashion us, we offer this explanation: A young man decides he wants the benefits of a healthy tan. Now, does he tan himself or does the sun tan him? Of course the answer is that he tans himself by exposing himself to the sun. He has but to bring himself into contact with the sun's rays and the sun will take care of the rest.

So we fashion ourselves by exposing our lives to the molding influences, good or bad, that lie around us. Let us pull this thought down from the theoretical to the practical and identify some of the powers that shape us.

FRIENDS. We are all influenced powerfully by our companions. Even the strongest characters are shaped by the company they keep. They may flatter themselves that they, with their dominant personalities, are shaping others and are uninfluenced by the lives of their friends; but we cannot escape the power of friendships.

LITERATURE. What we read with enjoyment does much to decide what we shall be finally. To lend the mind to the spell of a book is to become clay in the potter's hand. In our Protestant system no one can decide what we shall read, but what we read will shape us for good or evil.

MUSIC. There is about music a subtle charm that no normal person can resist. It works to condition the mind and prepare it for the reception of ideas, moral and immoral, which in turn prepare the will to act either in righteousness or in sin. The notion that music and song are merely for amusement and that their effects can be laughed off is a deadly error. Actually they exercise a powerful creative influence over the plastic human soul. And their permanent effects will be apparent in our growth in grace or in evil.

PLEASURES. The human constitution is so constructed that it requires a certain amount of pleasure; it is built for it as a harp is built for music, and remains incomplete and unfulfilled without it. Sin lies not in receiving pleasure but in deriving it from wrong objects. A mother tending her baby in a glow of delight or smiling in death when she hears that her late-born is normal and will live presents a tender picture of unselfish pleasure. A man at the card table fascinated by the thrills and perils of gambling is an example of degraded and

demoralizing pleasure. The Christian should look well to his pleasures for they will ennoble or debase him, and this by a secret law of the soul from which there is no escape.

AMBITIONS. The great saints of the world have all been ambitious. They were driven forward by an inward urge that finally became too much for them. Paul stated his ambition as being a desire to know Christ and to enter into the fullest meaning of His death and resurrection, and toward this goal he pressed with everything that lay in him. By this ambition he was propelled upward to the very peak of spiritual perfection. Carnal and selfish ambitions, however, have just the opposite effect. Each one should watch his ambitions, for they will shape him as an artist shapes the yielding clay.

THOUGHTS. We Christians need to take into account the tremendous power that lies in plain, ordinary thinking. We have allowed ourselves to be cheated out of a precious treasure by the irresponsible babblings of weird occultists and quack religionists who make too much of the human mind or who misunderstand it altogether. From

them we have turned away, and have turned so far that we forget that it is still true that a man will finally be what his active thoughts make him. It is hardly too much to say that no Christian ever fell into sin who didn't first allow himself to brood over it with increasing desire. And every godly soul knows how much spiritual meditations have meant to the total success of his inward life. "As (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he."

There are of course many others, but these are among the major forces that shape our lives. To sum up, the wise Christian will take advantage of every proper means of grace and every ennobling and purifying influence that God in His providence places in his way. Conversely, he will avoid every degrading influence and flee from these forces that make for evil. He has but to cooperate with God in embracing the good. God himself will do the rest.

*A.W. Tozer (1897-1963) was a popular evangelical pastor and preacher. The author of thirty books, including *The Pursuit of God* and *The Knowledge of the Holy*, he has been called one of the most influential American evangelists of the twentieth century.*

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