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My Utmost for His Highest

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A Word about Oswald and Bidley Chambers

Oswald Chambers was not famous during his lifetime. At the time of his death in 1917, at the age of forty-three, only three books bearing his name had been published. Among a relatively small circle of Christians in Britain and the U.S., Chambers was much appreciated as a teacher of rare insight and expression, but he was not widely known.

His wide-ranging influence came during the decades following his death as his widow compiled Oswald's spoken words into thirty published books, many of which have become Christian classics: *Baffled to Fight Better, If Ye Shall Ask, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, and of course, *My Utmost for His Highest*.

Oswald Chambers was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, on July 24, 1874, the eighth of nine children of Rev. Clarence Chambers, a rather stern Baptist minister, and his gracious wife, Hannah. During Oswald's boyhood years in Perth, he first exhibited his keen talent in art. When he was fifteen, the family moved to London where Oswald made his public profession of faith in Christ and became a member of Rye Lane Baptist Church. This marked a period of rapid spiritual growth, along with an intense struggle to find God's will and way for his life.

As a gifted artist and musician, Chambers trained at London's National Art Training School, later named the Royal Academy of Art. He sensed God's call to be an ambassador for Christ in the world of art, music, and aesthetics. But while studying at the University of Edinburgh (1895–96), he experienced a major redirection in life. Following an agonizing internal battle, he decided to train for the Christian ministry, a profession he said he would never enter “unless God takes me by the scruff of the neck and throws me in.” He left the university and entered Dunoon College, near Glasgow, where he spent nine years, first as a theological student, then as a tutor of philosophy. Under

the wise guidance of Rev. Duncan MacGregor, his mentor and friend, Oswald matured greatly and came through a long “dark night of the soul” into a deeper and more joyful knowledge of Christ.

In 1906 and 1907 Oswald spent six months teaching at God’s Bible School in Cincinnati, Ohio. From there he went to Japan, visiting the Tokyo Bible School, founded by Charles and Lettie Cowman. This journey around the world marked his transition from Dunoon College to full-time work with the London-based Pentecostal League of Prayer.

While serving as a travelling speaker and representative of the League of Prayer in Britain, Oswald met Gertrude Hobbs. Their friendship blossomed during a voyage to the United States in the summer of 1908, and two years later they were married. Oswald called her “Beloved Disciple,” shortened to the initials B.D., and spoken as “Biddy.” For the rest of her life, she was known by this affectionate nickname.

A longtime dream of Oswald’s became reality in January 1911 with the opening of the Bible Training College (BTC) near Clapham Common in London. Sponsored by the League of Prayer, it housed twenty-five residential students and reached hundreds more through evening classes and Bible correspondence courses. Oswald served as Principal and main teacher while Biddy filled the role of Lady Superintendent, overseeing a myriad of logistical details, from the preparation of meals to temporary housing for missionary families in transit through London.

During Oswald’s lectures Biddy sat in the back of the room recording his words verbatim in her precise Pitman’s shorthand. Trained as a court stenographer, she could take dictation rapidly while remaining engaged with her husband’s purpose as he taught. Biddy’s storehouse of notes grew as Oswald taught Biblical Psychology, Studies in Genesis, Biblical Ethics, and a host of other classes. Of special significance were her records of the sermon class and the weekly devotional hour when Oswald spoke to the residential students from his heart.

Their only child, Kathleen, was born in May 1913, and promptly began her reign as queen of the BTC. Oswald found himself completely charmed by this new arrival. He had always loved children, but the feelings produced by his own daughter were something entirely new. When she cried at the top of her lungs during a meal at the college, Oswald would say, "And now my daughter will sing." But the happy days of a settled life in London were soon to end.

The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 changed Britain dramatically and led to the closing of the BTC within a year. Oswald volunteered as a YMCA secretary in Egypt, where Bidy, Kathleen, and several former students from the BTC joined him to assist in the work. At Zeitoun Camp, near Cairo, Oswald quickly established himself as a friend of the troops and a man of uncommon spiritual insight. One soldier described him as "the personification of the Sherlock Holmes of fiction—tall, erect, virile, with clean-cut face, framing a pair of piercing bright eyes . . . a detective of the soul."

Bidy continued to fill shorthand notebooks with Oswald's talks to the troops, including "The Shadow of an Agony," "Shade of His Hand" (Studies in Ecclesiastes), and "Baffled to Fight Better" (Studies in Job). Against the formidable foes of heat, insects, and blowing sand, she continued a ministry of hospitality that produced the special touches of home for the troops so far from their families.

In a letter to Bidy's mother, Oswald freely praised his wife: "As for Bidy I love her and I am her husband but I do not believe it is possible to exaggerate what she has been in the way of a Sacrament out here—God conveying His presence through the common elements of an ordinary life. The letters she has received from mothers and wives and sisters and fathers and brothers are in themselves a deep testimony to a most unconscious ministry of wife and mother and woman."

In the desert camp Oswald supervised the construction of rock-lined walkways and a myriad of flower beds. Some

critics said it was a waste of time, but Chambers believed that if physical improvements were not made and new touches occasionally given to the huts, they would reflect slovenly care, displeasing to God. "A grave defect in much work of today," he said, "is that men do not follow Solomon's admonition, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.' The tendency is to argue, 'It's only for so short a time, why trouble?' If it is only for five minutes, let it be well done."

In late October 1917 Oswald underwent an emergency appendectomy and appeared to be recovering. But two weeks later, while still in Gizeh Red Cross Hospital, he suffered a relapse and died early in the morning on November 15. All those who knew and loved him were stunned.

Dazed with disbelief and sorrow, Biddy began dealing with the numbing tasks facing a young widow with a four-year-old daughter. Her telegram to family and friends in Britain said simply, "Oswald in His Presence." The next afternoon, Chambers was buried with full military honors in the British Military Cemetery in Old Cairo.

For the next two years, Biddy and Kathleen continued to work among the troops at Zeitoun. In the ways of God's providence, which Oswald frequently referred to as "the haphazard," Biddy's personal sending of one of his sermons as a Christmas gift to the troops in Egypt mushroomed into a monthly printing and mailing of 10,000 copies by the YMCA. Gradually it became clear to Biddy that her calling in life was to give her husband's words to the world. In so doing, she continued the dream she and Oswald had shared of working together to help others.

Upon her return to England in 1919, Biddy continued transcribing her shorthand notes and preparing them for publication. She worked to support herself and Kathleen, using any money from sales to help finance the next book.

While maintaining a boarding house for students in Oxford, Biddy compiled a book of daily readings which she titled *My Utmost for His Highest*. Since it was first published in 1927, *My Utmost* has been continuously in print and has

sold millions of copies. It exists today in more than forty different languages, and every day, multiplied thousands of people around the world open its pages seeking a word from the Lord through His servant Oswald Chambers.

From the earliest days of publication after World War I, Mrs. Chambers was advised and assisted by a small group of personal friends. In later years, this group became known as the Oswald Chambers Publications Association. It was incorporated in 1942, and exists today as a Registered British Charity overseeing the publication and distribution of Oswald Chambers's material around the world. Royalties are used to help fund new translations of Chambers's books in developing nations and to provide gift copies of the OC books to students and pastors.

My Utmost for His Highest, along with all the other OC books, sprang from the shared life and vision of two remarkable people—Oswald and Biddy Chambers. The books are the result of their love for God, for each other, and for people everywhere. Together Oswald and Biddy touched individuals from varied backgrounds and many nations through hospitality, biblical teaching, encouragement, and joyful good humor. The pages of *My Utmost* are infused with their belief that taking the gospel to the whole earth involves following God's example of "keeping open house for the universe."

Kathleen described her mother as always having time for people. A knock at the door would take her from the typewriter to the teakettle. She considered it just as important to chat with a child from the neighborhood as it was to prepare the next book for publication. Biddy personally answered the hundreds of letters that came to her, and often included a complimentary copy of one of Oswald's books with her reply.

By the time Biddy Chambers died in 1966, she had compiled and published some fifty books that bore the name of Oswald Chambers but never mentioned her own. Occasional words of greeting at the beginning of a volume, followed by her initials "B.C.," were the only evidence of her role.

In the weeks just after Oswald's death in Egypt, Bidly wrote to her mother of a friend whose life had been radically changed by reading some of Oswald's sermons. "It confirms me so much in the assurance I have that I am to go on getting everything I can printed," Bidly said. "It will be like casting bread upon the waters and we'll know someday all it has meant in people's lives." To her sister, she wrote: "Living with Oswald and seeing his faith in God and knowing that 'by his faithfulness he is speaking to us still' is the secret of life these days, and I feel as if it will be overwhelming to one day see what God has wrought, and one will only be sorry not to have trusted more utterly. So just go on praying and believing and we will surely find that God is doing His wondrous things all the time."

By their faithfulness in the ordinary circumstances of each unfolding day, Oswald and Bidly Chambers have demonstrated the significance and power of giving our utmost for God's highest.

David McCasland

MY
UTMOST
FOR HIS
HIGHEST

Let Us Keep to the Point

My eager desire and hope being that I may never feel ashamed, but that now as ever I may do honour to Christ in my own person by fearless courage. Philippians 1:20 (MOFFATT)

My Utmost for His Highest. “My eager desire and hope being that I may never feel ashamed.” We shall all feel very much ashamed if we do not yield to Jesus on the point He has asked us to yield to Him. Paul says—“My determination is to be my utmost for His Highest.” To get there is a question of will, not of debate nor of reasoning, but a surrender of will, an absolute and irrevocable surrender on that point. An over-weening consideration for ourselves is the thing that keeps us from that decision, though we put it that we are considering others. When we consider what it will cost others if we obey the call of Jesus, we tell God He does not know what our obedience will mean. Keep to the point; He does know. Shut out every other consideration and keep yourself before God for this one thing only—“My Utmost for His Highest.” I am determined to be absolutely and entirely for Him and for Him alone.

My Undeterredness for His Holiness. “Whether that means life or death, no matter!” (v. 21 MOFFATT). Paul is determined that nothing shall deter him from doing exactly what God wants. God’s order has to work up to a crisis in our lives because we will not heed the gentler way. He brings us to the place where He asks us to be our utmost for Him, and we begin to debate; then He produces a providential crisis where we have to decide—for or against, and from that point the “Great Divide” begins.

If the crisis has come to you on any line, surrender your will to Him absolutely and irrevocably.

Will You Go Out without Knowing?

He went out, not knowing whither

he went. **Hebrews 11:8**

Have you been “out” in this way? If so, there is no logical statement possible when anyone asks you what you are doing. One of the difficulties in Christian work is this question—“What do you expect to do?” You do not know what you are going to do; the only thing you know is that God knows what He is doing. Continually revise your attitude towards God and see if it is a going out of everything, trusting in God entirely. It is this attitude that keeps you in perpetual wonder—you do not know what God is going to do next. Each morning you wake it is to be a “going out,” building in confidence on God. “Take no thought for your life, . . . nor yet for your body”—take no thought for the things for which you did take thought before you “went out.”

Have you been asking God what He is going to do? He will never tell you. God does not tell you what He is going to do; He reveals to you Who He is. Do you believe in a miracle-working God, and will you go out in surrender to Him until you are not surprised an atom at anything He does?

Suppose God is the God you know Him to be when you are nearest to Him, what an impertinence worry is! Let the attitude of the life be a continual “going out” in dependence upon God, and your life will have an ineffable charm about it which is a satisfaction to Jesus. You have to learn to go out of convictions, out of creeds, out of experiences, until, so far as your faith is concerned, there is nothing between yourself and God.

Clouds and Darkness

*Clouds and darkness are round
about Him. Psalm 97:2*

A man who has not been born of the Spirit of God will tell you that the teachings of Jesus are simple. But when you are baptised with the Holy Ghost, you find “clouds and darkness are round about Him.” When we come into close contact with the teachings of Jesus Christ we have our first insight into this aspect of things. The only possibility of understanding the teaching of Jesus is by the light of the Spirit of God on the inside. If we have never had the experience of taking our commonplace religious shoes off our commonplace religious feet, and getting rid of all the undue familiarity with which we approach God, it is questionable whether we have ever stood in His presence. The people who are flippant and familiar are those who have never yet been introduced to Jesus Christ. After the amazing delight and liberty of realising what Jesus Christ *does*, comes the impenetrable darkness of realising Who He *is*.

Jesus said: “The words that I speak unto you,” not—“the words I have spoken”—“they are spirit, and they are life.” The Bible has been so many words to us—clouds and darkness, then all of a sudden the words become spirit and life because Jesus re-speaks them to us in a particular condition. That is the way God speaks to us, not by visions and dreams, but by words. When a man gets to God it is by the most simple way of words.

Why Cannot I Follow Thee Now?

*Peter said unto Him, Lord, why cannot I
follow Thee now? John 13:37*

There are times when you cannot understand why you cannot do what you want to do. When God brings the blank space, see that you do not fill it in, but wait. The blank space may come in order to teach you what sanctification means; or it may come after sanctification to teach you what service means. Never run before God's guidance. If there is the slightest doubt, then He is not guiding. Whenever there is doubt—*don't*.

In the beginning you may see clearly what God's will is—the severance of a friendship, the breaking off of a business relationship, something you feel distinctly before God is His will for you to do, never do it on the impulse of that feeling. If you do, you will end in making difficulties that will take years of time to put right. Wait for God's time to bring it round and He will do it without any heartbreak or disappointment. When it is a question of the providential will of God, wait for God to move.

Peter did not wait on God, he forecast in his mind where the test would come, and the test came where he did not expect it. "I will lay down my life for Thy sake." Peter's declaration was honest but ignorant. "Jesus answered him . . . The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice." This was said with a deeper knowledge of Peter than Peter had of himself. He could not follow Jesus because he did not know himself, or of what he was capable. Natural devotion may be all very well to attract us to Jesus, to make us feel His fascination, but it will never make us disciples. Natural devotion will always deny Jesus somewhere or other.

The Afterwards of the Life of Power

*Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now;
but thou shalt follow Me afterwards.* **John 13:36**

“And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me.” Three years before, Jesus had said—“Follow Me,” and Peter had followed easily, the fascination of Jesus was upon him, he did not need the Holy Spirit to help him to do it. Then he came to the place where he denied Jesus, and his heart broke. Then he received the Holy Spirit, and now Jesus says again—“Follow Me.” There is no figure in front now saving the Lord Jesus Christ. The first “Follow Me” had nothing mystical in it, it was an external following; now it is a following in internal martyrdom (cf. John 21:18).

Between these times Peter had denied Jesus with oaths and curses, he had come to the end of himself and all his self-sufficiency; there was not one strand of himself he would ever rely upon again, and in his destitution he was in a fit condition to receive an impartation from the risen Lord. “He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” No matter what changes God has wrought in you, never rely upon them, build only on a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, and on the Spirit He gives.

All our vows and resolutions end in denial because we have no power to carry them out. When we have come to the end of ourselves, not in imagination but really, we are able to receive the Holy Spirit. “*Receive* ye the Holy Ghost”—the idea is that of invasion. There is only one lodestar in the life now, the Lord Jesus Christ.

JANUARY 6

Worship

And he . . . pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Ai on the east: and there he builded an altar. Genesis 12:8 (RV)

Worship is giving God the best that He has given you. Be careful what you do with the best you have. Whenever you get a blessing from God, give it back to Him as a love gift. Take time to meditate before God and offer the blessing back to Him in a deliberate act of worship. If you hoard a thing for yourself, it will turn into spiritual dry rot, as the manna did when it was hoarded. God will never let you hold a spiritual thing for yourself; it has to be given back to Him that He may make it a blessing to others.

Bethel is the symbol of communion with God; Ai is the symbol of the world. Abraham pitched his tent between the two. The measure of the worth of our public activity for God is the private profound communion we have with Him. Rush is wrong every time; there is always plenty of time to worship God. Quiet days with God may be a snare. We have to pitch our tents where we shall always have quiet times with God, however noisy our times with the world may be. There are not three stages in spiritual life—worship, waiting and work. Some of us go in jumps like spiritual frogs, we jump from worship to waiting, and from waiting to work. God's idea is that the three should go together. They were always together in the life of Our Lord. He was unhasting and unresting. It is a discipline, we cannot get into it all at once.

Intimate with Jesus

*Have I been so long with you, and yet hast
thou not known Me? John 14:9*

These words are not spoken as a rebuke, nor even with surprise; Jesus is leading Philip on. The last One with whom we get intimate is Jesus. Before Pentecost the disciples knew Jesus as the One Who gave them power to conquer demons and to bring about a revival (see Luke 10:18–20). It was a wonderful intimacy, but there was a much closer intimacy to come—“I have called you friends.” Friendship is rare on earth. It means identity in thought and heart and spirit. The whole discipline of life is to enable us to enter into this closest relationship with Jesus Christ. We receive His blessings and know His word, but do we know Him?

Jesus said—“It is expedient for you that I go away”—in that relationship, so that He might lead them on. It is a joy to Jesus when a disciple takes time to step more intimately with Him. Fruitbearing is always mentioned as the manifestation of an intimate union with Jesus Christ (John 15:1–4).

When once we get intimate with Jesus we are never lonely, we never need sympathy, we can pour out all the time without being pathetic. The saint who is intimate with Jesus will never leave impressions of himself, but only the impression that Jesus is having unhindered way, because the last abyss of his nature has been satisfied by Him. The only impression left by such a life is that of the strong calm sanity that Our Lord gives to those who are intimate with Him.

Does My Sacrifice Live?

*And Abraham built an altar . . . and
bound Isaac his son. Genesis 22:9*

This incident is a picture of the blunder we make in thinking that the final thing God wants of us is the sacrifice of death. What God wants is the sacrifice *through* death which enables us to do what Jesus did, viz., sacrifice our lives. Not “I am willing to go to death with Thee,” but, “I am willing to be identified with Thy death so that I may sacrifice my life to God.” We seem to think that God wants us to give up things! God purified Abraham from this blunder, and the same discipline goes on in our lives. God nowhere tells us to give up things for the sake of giving them up. He tells us to give them up for the sake of the only thing worth having, viz., life with Himself. It is a question of loosening the bands that hinder the life, and immediately those bands are loosened by identification with the death of Jesus, we enter into a relationship with God whereby we can sacrifice our lives to Him.

It is of no value to God to give Him your life for death. He wants you to be a “*living* sacrifice,” to let Him have all your powers that have been saved and sanctified through Jesus. This is the thing that is acceptable to God.

Intercessory Introspection

*And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body
be preserved blameless. 1 Thessalonians 5:23*

“Your whole spirit . . .” The great mystical work of the Holy Spirit is in the dim regions of our personality which we cannot get at. Read the 139th Psalm; the Psalmist implies—“Thou art the God of the early mornings, the God of the late at nights, the God of the mountain peaks, and the God of the sea; but, my God, my soul has further horizons than the early mornings, deeper darkness than the nights of earth, higher peaks than any mountain peaks, greater depths than any sea in nature—Thou Who art the God of all these, be my God. I cannot reach to the heights or to the depths; there are motives I cannot trace, dreams I cannot get at—my God, search me out.”

Do we believe that God can garrison the imagination far beyond where we can go? “*The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin*”—if that means in conscious experience only, may God have mercy on us. The man who has been made obtuse by sin will say he is not conscious of sin. Cleansing from sin is to the very heights and depths of our spirit if we will keep in the light as God is in the light, and the very Spirit that fed the life of Jesus Christ will feed the life of our spirits. It is only when we are garrisoned by God with the stupendous sanctity of the Holy Spirit, that spirit, soul and body are preserved in unspotted integrity, undeserving of censure in God’s sight, until Jesus comes.

We do not allow our minds to dwell as they should on these great massive truths of God.

The Opened Sight

*To open their eyes, . . . that they
may receive . . . Acts 26:18*

This verse is the grandest condensation of the propaganda of a disciple of Jesus Christ in the whole of the New Testament.

The first sovereign work of grace is summed up in the words—"that they may receive remission of sins" (RV). When a man fails in personal Christian experience, it is nearly always because he has never *received* anything. The only sign that a man is saved is that he has received something from Jesus Christ. Our part as workers for God is to open men's eyes that they may turn themselves from darkness to light; but that is not salvation, that is conversion—the effort of a roused human being. I do not think it is too sweeping to say that the majority of nominal Christians are of this order; their eyes are opened, but they have received nothing. Conversion is not regeneration. This is one of the neglected factors in our preaching today. When a man is born again, he knows that it is because he has received something as a gift from Almighty God and not because of his own decision. People register their vows, and sign their pledges, and determine to go through, but none of this is salvation. Salvation means that we are brought to the place where we are able to receive something from God on the authority of Jesus Christ, viz., remission of sins.

Then there follows the second mighty work of grace—"and inheritance among them which are sanctified." In sanctification the regenerated soul deliberately gives up his right to himself to Jesus Christ, and identifies himself entirely with God's interest in other men.

OVER 13 MILLION SOLD

“The insights that Oswald Chambers has sometimes just overwhelm me. There are days when I think, ‘Wow, did I need to read that!’ It’s just part of my life—I read it every day.” **MICHAEL W. SMITH**

“*My Utmost for His Highest* is a devotional of fresh and vital insights.”
JONI EARECKSON TADA

“I’m a massive fan of *My Utmost for His Highest*. It’s affected my life more than any book other than the Bible. It is a constant wake-up call reminding me to give up the rights to myself.” **TOBY MAC**

“Oswald Chambers’s book is about what it means to give all that we are to the One who is holy and righteous. . . . It causes me to want to give all that I am, my utmost, for all that He is, His Highest.”
STEVEN CURTIS CHAPMAN

“What I like about this book is it reminds me about Jesus, about His love for us, and that we have a God who gives us wisdom and truth in a world where truth is hard to come by. His steady discipline to stay true to the Scriptures is an inspiration. I’ve had this book next to my bed for years.”
DONALD MILLER

“*My Utmost for His Highest* is one of a kind. It has been a source of challenge and blessing in my own life for years. . . . I don’t think anyone can read it consistently without being a better servant of Christ.”
RUTH BELL GRAHAM

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