

(Dangers in the Way Series): Dangers of Idleness and Busyness

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the dangers of both idleness and excessive busyness in the Christian life, advocating for a balanced approach to work and spiritual renewal.

Duration: 25:35

Scripture: Proverbs 14:23, Proverbs 16:3, Daniel 6:10, Matthew 6:33, John 1:1-2, Ephesians 5:15-17, James 1:22

Topics: "Busyness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the dangers that Christians may encounter on their spiritual journey. The speaker emphasizes the importance of walking circumspectly and not being foolish, but wise. They also highlight the need for Christians to take time to cultivate their relationship with God, just as Dr. Rubin Atorio did by taking two weeks off every year to spend time in nature and reflect on God's truth. The speaker warns against excessive religious work, as it can hinder the effectiveness of one's spiritual work. They encourage Christians to find their place in the kingdom of God and contribute in meaningful ways, using the example of a man who took care of the church lawn and saw it flourish under his care.

Transcript

It is difficult to follow consecutively a series of talks because of the interruptions that come from other speakers and from conventions and an occasional absence. But I feel that I would like to continue to talk a little for a Sunday or two yet about the dangers to the Christian, dangers that lie in the Christian's path. And as a kind of text, I have here in the fifth chapter of Ephesians these words, See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.

Don't be foolish, but be wise, and walk circumspectly. Circumspectly is one of those easy-to-figure-out words, circle meaning round, where we get our words circle and circumference and all such words. And spectly, of course, means look.

We talk about spectacle, we used to call them that. And so we are exhorted here to walk looking around, not plunging foolishly headlong, but walk looking around. Now, I repeat that I do not wish to make my hearers danger-conscious, because if you become danger-conscious excessively, that will slow you down.

Scripture says, He that observed the wind shall not sow, and he that regarded the clouds shall not reap. The farmer who never looks at the wind, or observes the wind, or looks at the clouds, will be a very foolish farmer, and he will not have a very good crop at the end of the year. But the man who becomes so cloud-conscious and wind-conscious that he gets up and moistens his finger and holds it up to see which way the wind is blowing every morning, and then sneaks back away if there is a cloud overhead, he will get nothing done.

He that observed the wind shall not sow. There are times when you must pay no attention to the wind, and he that regarded the clouds shall not reap. There will always be a cloud warning you to stay indoors.

But the wise man will know which cloud to regard and which to disregard. So we Christians are not to become so conscious of the wind and the clouds that we don't do anything. But on the other hand, if we are unaware of danger, we increase that danger a hundredfold and almost guarantee disaster.

For that reason, I have given this series on the dangers in the way. Today I want to talk about the danger of idleness and the danger of busyness. First there is the danger of idleness.

You see, God made us for creative activity. There is a notion abroad in the day in which we live that labor is a sin, or at best it is a curse resting upon us. I think some Christians even have that notion, that labor is a curse, that it is a disciplinary punishment which the Lord laid upon the world at the fall.

Nothing could be further from the fact than this, for if you will read the Bible before the third chapter of Genesis and the fall, you will remember that God told the newly created couple that they were to replenish the earth and subdue it. Replenishing the earth meant there were to be children born into the world, and anybody who imagines that there can be children brought up in the world without work has never had any children, or even been where they are. And the command to subdue the earth certainly embraces the idea of work.

Then it says that they were placed in a garden to dress it and to keep it. They were not there to be idle. God the Creator made man in his image and made him to be something of a creator, too.

So that man was to labor, he was to subdue the earth. They were to bring children into the world and work to bring up those children, and they were to dress the garden and keep it in shape. So that meant work.

So that work is not a result of the fall. But sin brought sorrow and thorns and thistles and sweat. There are four words that didn't occur in the first and second chapters of Genesis.

Sorrow and thorns and thistles and sweat, they did not occur. But the word work occurred, or its equivalent, dress and keep and subdue and care, those words occur in the first chapters. But the words sorrow, thorns, thistles and sweat, they were added when man sinned.

So remember that work is not a result of man's sin. But to work in sorrow, that's a result of man's sin. To work with thorns and thistles around you, that's the result of man's sin.

And to work until we sweat for our daily labor, that is a result of man's sin. So remember that God made us to be workers. Our Savior was a worker, and idleness is very un-Christlike and contrary to the high will of God.

For it is avoiding of our commission, and it is an invitation to temptation. You know, our fathers had a little saying, I think Isaac Watts wrote it in his little book for children, that the devil always finds some task for idle hands to do. And the word idle was in other days a very evil word, a very evil word.

Our fathers scorned the word, they hated it, and they wrote poems about it, as Isaac Watts did. The devil always finds some task for idle hands to do. Now, I have no statistics on this, but I think I'd be safe in saying that ninety-five percent of the devilry of the world is thought up by people who have nothing to do at the time.

People who are engaged in some kind of productive activity may sin, but they are not as likely to as those who have nothing to do. It was when David had ended his labors and was on the housetop taking a little idle walk that he looked down and saw the scene that led him to the great temptation into adultery and murder. So that ninety-five percent of the devilry of the world results, in my estimation, from people who have nothing else to do.

Now the idle Christian is in great danger. He's in danger because, as I say, he's unlike his Savior. Our Lord went about doing good, and there is no excuse for idleness.

We're not thinking at the moment of recreation. Personally, I think that recreation racket is greatly overdone. But I do grant that there should be some recreation, some exercise.

But while we're not speaking of recreation, we are speaking about idleness. And our Lord was not idle. He chose industrious men for his disciples.

He did not go to the Riviera and pick playboys, whether they be Baudais or Jimmy Walkers or who. He picked simple men who were hard workers, who had something to do, who took an interest in life and had something to do. He did it deliberately and purposefully.

Therefore, I recommend to you Christians that you make yourself available, that you be ready to do anything. Don't hold yourself off until you're ready to do something. Start doing something now.

Learn to ride your bicycle by trial and error. Don't wait until you've learned to ride it before you buy one. But get one now and practice on it.

Get something done. You may make a lot of mistakes at first, of course. But do something.

If you can't do anything around the Church, some people say there's nothing for us to do. Had it said your Church has a wealth of talent and there's nothing for me to do, well, I suppose that person would mean that you have your soloist and there's no solo for me to sing, or no committee for me to be the chairman of. Well, if it's to be chairman of a committee or sing a solo, of course, maybe.

The average Church wouldn't have room for everybody. But any Christian who is worth his salt will find something to do in the kingdom of God. We learned, and I suppose everybody knows it, but it came very dramatically home to us on the farm, that farm machinery seldom wears out.

If you keep your machinery up, you can use it summer in and summer out and all along, seasons over and over and over until it becomes obsolete. And some new thing you buy to replace that which is an obsolete piece of machinery, not worn out, just old-fashioned. But one season sitting out in the weather will wreck any piece of machinery.

The idle machine sitting in the dampness will go to pieces in one season, but that same machine used for ten years will only brighten it up, make it shine. Maybe a bolt will wear out, can be replaced, nothing, and the machine will go on. Now, Christians are exactly like farm implements.

One year of sitting around sulking will do more to rust your soul than one hundred years of hard work, if God granted you that many years. Don't be afraid of wearing yourself out. The devil is a master of strategy.

And when a child of God gets busy, he whispers in their ear, now watch it, because you're going to have a nervous breakdown. I am positively sure the nervous breakdowns do not come from working in the easy yoke of Jesus Christ. They come from frustrations and hidden sins and stubbornness and refusing to hear God and wanting our own way.

But they don't come from working, his yoke is easy, his burden is light, I've found it so, I've found it so. And I'm sure that there isn't a gray hair in this head of mine that was ever placed there by honest labor in the kingdom of my Savior. Not any want one.

But I wonder how many are there because I wanted my own way. I wonder how many are there because I wanted the world to obey me and they wouldn't listen. Stubbornness, contrariness, resentfulness, those will bring frustration and illness, but not the late work of the Lord.

Jesus Christ would never have gotten sick. He could have lived infinite years working as he worked. He did not kill himself by hard work, they had to kill him on the cross.

Paul became very old in the work of God and was still going when they cut his head off. Peter, when they crucified him. So it's our human weaknesses and faults that cause us to break down not working in the service of the Lord.

So don't be afraid to work. You'll rust out and some of you may have rusted out. It may be too late to do very much now, it's your time.

The rust is so complete that like the one horse shay, one good lunge and you're finished. But I don't think it's true of very many, maybe of nobody. I'm optimistic enough to think that that's an extreme statement and there's nobody here that's completely rusted out.

There may be a little rust around here and there and you can get rid of that by going to work. You can wear your rust off awfully easy and you'll not wear yourself out in doing it. So there's the danger of idleness.

So many idle Christians who say, I have nothing to do. There's intercession to be made. There are calls to be made.

There are letters to be written. There are booklets and tracts to be distributed. There's singing to be done.

There are many things to be done. I remember, I'll tell this again, because the sermon won't be long anyway, but a man who asked me whether he could do something around the church, that was when I was in Indianapolis. And I said, Elmer, I don't know anything you could do.

Well, I thought he wanted, of course, to be chairman of something. But he didn't. He said, well, can I take care of the lawn? I said, yes, you can take care of the lawn.

So Elmer took care of the lawn. And that lawn never prospered as it did. He varnished the sign out in front. He kept the little pipe fence up nicely. And the thing positively began to look like a golf course. Elmer had just been converted a short time, and something in him wanted to work.

And he was humble enough that he was willing to take care of a lawn, anything to look after the work of God and do something. Well, the story is, it wasn't very long until Elmer was preaching on the street. And after that, he began to preach in institutions here and there.

And a little later, he began to go to another town out from Indianapolis and hold meetings. And that formed into a little group. And then came a church.

And now there's an alliance church there, preaching the gospel and giving commissions and praying for missions and sending out missionaries, all because a man, newly converted, was willing to do anything. If he had sought and told his wife, there's too much talent around here. I can't be chairman of anything.

I have nothing for me to do. He'd have rusted out, and that church never would have been established there. But Elmer Durant was too much of a Christian to want to head something.

He did head something later on, as I've explained. But he began by cutting a lawn. So let's not be idle.

The devil always finds something for idle men and women to do. So there's a danger in idleness. Let's walk circumspectly and watch that.

That's a ditch on one side of the road, but over on the other side of the road, there's another ditch, and it's called busyness. And there's a great danger in busyness. Now, there's a time for everything, says the Holy Ghost.

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die, and a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to weep, and a time to laugh, and a time to mourn, and a time to dance, and a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather them.

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to get, and a time to lose, a time to keep, and a time to cast away. A time to rend, and a time to sow, a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.

There's the middle-of-the-road Christian realizing that he's not to be extreme on anything, but that he is to be wise. And the wise man will know the time and the season. Now, there is no time for idleness.

And the Scripture doesn't say there's a time for idleness here. But there is a time for relaxation. There is a time to realize that that's a time to camp, that you pitch your tent there and you don't go on for that day.

You've gone far enough that day. There's no time for idleness because idleness assumes lack of purpose. If I have no purpose, I will be idle.

It assumes disinclination to be inconvenienced, and it assumes addiction to pleasures. We have so many gadgets invented in our day to minister to idleness. Just idleness.

I mean, there's no place for that in the kingdom of God. But there's a time to cease activities, even the creatures beside the fire, up yonder in the heaven, as revealed in the first chapter of Ezekiel, those

creatures let down their wings and waited on God. Now, Daniel prayed three times a day.

And it's possible to be so busy in our secular work or even busy in the Lord's work that we have no time to pray, no time to wait on God or get still and sew up the raveled sleeve of care and adjust ourselves and orientate our soul toward God in heaven. And when that happens, there's danger. Daniel prayed three times a day.

The Prophet sought the silences. You will find that God looked for his men in the silence. Men who can't be silent might as well be silent, because they won't say anything when they talk.

It is only out of the silence that the Word speaks. In the beginning was the silence. Before the beginning was the silence, said the old writers, and then in the beginning was the Word.

The idea was that God spake out in the everlasting silence of his own holy self-contained being. And we're so likely to be so busy that we don't get anything done, and so talkative that we never say anything. The Prophet sought the silence, and in the silence they learned what to say.

And then they broke the silence by saying it and relapsed back into the silence again. We could well cut down the decibels in our homes and in our churches. I'm always a cautious and afraid of noisy people.

It takes a very wise man to talk all the time and say anything. So let us learn the scriptural silence. And Christ himself went into the desert, and there in the silence.

For days and nights he waited on his God under the temptation of the devil. And when he came out from there, he came out in the fullness of the Spirit and went out to preach the Word of God everywhere. And our Lord himself told us to shut the door.

He said, Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray unto thy Father which is in secret. And thy Father who heareth in secret shall reward thee openly. Secular business can ruin men.

A man called me up the other day, not a member of this church, a member of some church down south further, and he said, I have been a Christian a few years and I want to do God's will. He said, I have a business, a real estate business, and I have partners. And he said, we have made it a rule to be only open on weekdays and close on Sunday.

He said, now my partners want to open on Sunday. What would you say? What would you have told him? What would you have told him? I said, by all means, follow the light. By all means, lose the sale and keep your good conscience.

And if your partners won't listen, sell out and start something of your own. God will bless you for it. Not that I am a Sabbatarian, no.

Not that I believe that one day is above another day, no. But I believe we ought to have some time for God. And the man who works seven days a week has no time for God.

The office that keeps open to get a few more extra nickels on that seventh day has no time for God. Whether he takes Wednesday, Sunday, or Friday off, he ought to take a day off. But Sunday would be the day to take off.

It's a testimony and it enables the man to get into the house of God and mingle and raise his voice in songs of Zion with the people of God. Now, I haven't heard from this businessman. I don't know whether he took my advice or not.

But I think he did, because he felt very keenly that he should not open on Sunday. We're not Sabbatarians, but we do believe that there is a time for everything. And secular business can ruin men unless they take time to cultivate God.

But, as I have said, excessive religious work can do the same unless we take time to cultivate God. Dr. Reuben H. Horry used to take two weeks out of every year, put on old clothes, and go into the hills. Nobody knew his whereabouts but his wife.

Nothing short of death was to get a message through to him. No telephone, no telegram, no cable, no anything. Two weeks he waited, and relaxed, and rested, and gazed at the sky, and listened.

And then came back to the busy world with a heart and a mind filled with truth. Too much busyness in the work of the Lord can destroy the effectiveness of that work. Now, I want to give you a little model here.

If you're too busy in the Lord's work to spend time in the Lord's presence, then you're too busy in the Lord's work. So let's be careful. Walk circumspectly, looking around.

Here's the broad highway of God. And over on the left, there is idleness. And over on the right is excessive busyness.

And then there's the great broad highway in the middle. And we can follow that highway, and go along, and have plenty of room, and get a world of work done. And still not rust out from idleness, nor kill ourselves with excessive busyness.

There's a time for everything. So we wait on God to renew our batteries. And then when they're up to full power, we turn them loose into the work of God.

And thus we go wisely, not as fools, but as wise men. So let us remember these two dangers. Woe be to the idle Christian! He'll not grow in grace, even of baby exercises.

Six months old Ruthie, down at our house, my wife babysitting. Stanley's little girl, six months old, and beautiful. But exercise, she can't walk yet.

She can't even sit up, but exercise. Exercise, she exercises, she grunts. Just exercise.

Exercise, you grow when you exercise, and you stop growing when you stop. But if we get all worked up, and allow the world and the tense jitteriness of the world to excite us, and we're dashing continually in the work of God, just as great a danger. So let's ask God for wisdom, not to be idle ever, but to be inactive sometimes, for the sake of renewing our batteries, and relaxing our nerves, and quieting our minds, and above all things, seeing visions of God.

And then we'll not fall into either ditch. Down the great broad highway of Zion, we'll move toward a predetermined end. God grant this is my prayer this morning.

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