

(How to Get Out of a Religious Rut): Awakened Out of Sleep

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon emphasizes the need for Christians to awaken from spiritual slumber and actively pursue a deeper relationship with God.

Duration: 25:32

Scripture: Psalm 3:5, Psalm 4:8, Psalm 121:4, Psalm 127:2, Isaiah 60:1, Romans 13:11, Ephesians 5:14

Topics: "Religious Rut"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher draws a parallel between the Israelites in the Old Testament and the Church and its members in the present day. He emphasizes that both have settled into a contented rut and have become complacent in their spiritual journey. The preacher urges the congregation to break free from this routine and take hold of the promises and blessings that God has for them. He shares testimonies of individuals who were inspired by his previous sermons to let go of material possessions and idols in order to pursue a deeper relationship with God.

Transcript

The Lord, our God, spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount. Turn ye, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, in the vale, in the south, and by the seaside, to the land of the King of Nations, and unto Lebanon, and unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you.

Go in and possess the land which the Lord swore unto your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them, and to their seed after them. This is Old Testament truth, and it has to do with real estate and acreage and terrain and landscape and fields and forests. And they were to journey to it and take it, it was theirs by the gift of God.

Theirs was a journey for their feet. Ours is a journey for the heart. To recapitulate briefly, Israel had all the land of promise before them.

Yet they settled down and made no effort toward taking it. They stayed where they were, quiet contented, and God sought to goad them into action. So he told them bluntly, You have been here long enough.

Don't you see all of that is yours, why don't you go take it? The Church and its individual members, as I have tried to make clear, is in precisely the same condition. It has settled into a contended rut. Remember last week I said that there were three things, the rote, the rut, and the rot.

The rote is the routine, or rather, just a little before the routine. It leads to the routine. It's when you get to doing things rather automatically.

That leads us into the rut, and after we've been in the rut long enough, comes rot. The aim of these sermons has been and is to awaken some from the rut. I don't know that I can awaken everybody, but if I can awaken some, and I use the word awaken here very advisedly and very carefully, because in the Bible there is a significant teaching that gathers around the words sleep and wake.

There is first of all the natural sleep. He giveth his beloved sleep, I will lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou, Lord, wilt sustain me. Our Lord Jesus Christ slept in the boat.

There is such a thing as natural sleep, it's scarcely worth mentioning, because it's a gift of God to us, and we sleep if we can sleep, and we can't sleep something wrong. So, sleep, natural sleep, is innocent, provided it isn't done when we should be doing something else. If you sleep when you should be praying, then it isn't innocent sleep, though it's natural sleep.

Natural sleep is innocent sleep when he giveth his beloved sleep. But for instance, those disciples that slept when they should have been awake, praying with Jesus, that was natural sleep, but it wasn't innocent sleep. However, we'll leave that aside, for that's not what we're speaking about particularly tonight.

I'm thinking of moral sleep and spiritual sleep. The moral sleep is suggested in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 34, awake to righteousness and sin not, and so on. There is such a thing as a moral sleep.

It's entirely possible to be asleep morally, for you notice that the sleeping man isn't dead. Lord, if he sleeps, he's doing well, they said properly to Jesus, our Lord. If he's asleep, sick people don't sleep, and if this fellow is in a sound, natural sleep, why make the trip? He's all right.

They thought they meant natural sleep. But there is such a thing as moral sleep, where we're not dead as Lazarus was, but are alive, as the disciples supposed, but are sleeping. And it's entirely possible to be displeasing God and grieving the Holy Ghost by our being asleep morally.

That is, by permitting what should not be there. Nobody wants to hear this kind of preaching. Not very many people do.

Some do, or you wouldn't be here. Or at least you're willing to endure it for something else you come for. But most people don't want to hear this.

They want something added to what they have. But they don't want to be told that they're permitting something that shouldn't be there, or else they're doing what they shouldn't do. But you say, is that true of Christians? You believe many Christians are doing this? I have no hesitation in saying that all the symptoms in the Church today point to Christians doing things that they shouldn't be doing, and failing to do what they should be doing.

That's been negative into positive, sins of omission, sins of commission. And then to be unaware of it. This is to be morally asleep.

I don't want to sound abusive, because some of my best friends are asleep, and I haven't been able to wake them in years. But they're morally asleep. Then when he says, Wake to righteousness and sin not, he indicates that there can be a sudden waking, like an alarm clock going off, that rouses you out of sleep.

When I was in the Army, I used to hear first call, the little sound of the high trumpet. And I have never gotten over it. To this hour, if I hear anything that indicates that it's there to wake you, I'm awake.

Some people at alarm clock run down and go back to sleep, but not me. I'm out on the floor by the time the thing has hit its first few little taps. I'm trying to say that there is such a thing as being asleep, and then suddenly be awakened out of sleep.

And this is often surprising to people. I've had people say, and heard them say, I was living a life displeasing to God, I was a Church member and I didn't know it, that I was displeasing God, my life wasn't right, and then suddenly I was awakened by God. And it was a surprise, not only a surprise, but it's disconcerting to be traveling one way and driving and your wife beside you, and you have decided which way it is and where you are on the map, and then suddenly you find landmarks that indicate you are just plain wrong, that you have been going the wrong way.

It's not only a surprise to you, but it's disconcerting because you lose self-confidence, particularly in front of your wife. This loss of confidence in yourself, to say, what's the matter with me here? I've been living a life that has been displeasing to God, and I simply didn't know it. Oh, God is in this place and I knew it not.

This is none other than the gate of heaven, this is the house of God, and I didn't know it. Jacob must have been rather disconcerted when he woke up and found he had been in the presence of God all the time, but he had been asleep. He wasn't dead, he wasn't cut off from the covenant, he was asleep.

And there is such a thing as spiritual sleep. Ephesians 5.11--"Awake, thou that sleepest, and rise from the dead." This is often spoken to sinners, but it's not written to sinners. This Ephesian epistle never was written to sinners, it's not intended for sinners, it's not a message to sinners at all.

It's a message to one of the best churches of the New Testament, the Ephesian church. And yet he says, "...Awake, thou that sleepest, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give thee light." Some of them were in a somnolent condition. That is, they were morally good, obviously, but unenlightened.

They were religious, but unanointed. And it's perfectly possible for a church member, a good church member, a faithful and loyal church member, to be spiritually asleep, being in a state spiritually that parallels natural sleep. When your husband, your wife, your child, your relative, your friend, or you, goes or go to sleep tonight, the fact that you are unconscious and out of the running for a while isn't bothering you.

You know that normally you awake again. You are not dead, but you are cut off from your environment, all that which is reflex, breathing and a lot of other things. Now it's possible to be a Christian, be in the church, and yet be asleep spiritually.

And then to have to be awake suddenly and be ashamed of yourself, angry with yourself, frustrated and disconcerted, and say, What's the matter with me? All this long period of time I was just near to being

awake, but not quite awake. Now, what is the present condition of the evangelical church, of which this church is a part? Well, the bulk of Christians are asleep. I don't mean by that that the bulk of Christians, those who come to the evangelical churches, are not converted, because if I meant that, I'd say they were dead and that they never had been born again.

But I say they are asleep. And yet, these sleeping Christians, it's possible to be morally asleep and intellectually and mentally and physically completely alert. It's possible to be spiritually asleep and be mentally, intellectually, physically and theologically alert.

The present condition is that we are asleep. And yet, these sleeping Christians do two things that I think God must grieve over. One is, they control church affairs.

Because you see, we're democratic, and if we don't like the pastor, we give him the bounce or pray that he'll get another call. And then when it comes time to vote, we vote in whom we want and out whom we want out. Church people control church affairs, because they are intellectually, mentally, physically awake, but they may be morally and spiritually or morally or spiritually asleep.

That is, in the rut, down so far that they just don't see out. So that's one thing. We control church affairs.

This is a horrible thing. Then it gets into societies, it gets into whole conferences. And men will meet at the big expense, the expense of the local church people.

And they will read minutes and pass resolutions, but they're asleep. You know they're asleep by the way they talk as soon as the benediction is pronounced, as soon as they have adjourned. And you know they're asleep by their conduct, their things they're interested in or lack interest in, yet they control church affairs.

Then the second thing that these sleeping Christians do, they set the standard for new Christians. So when you bring a new Christian in and get him converted, he automatically takes on the coloration and the general mood and temperature of the psalms and saints around about him. And pretty soon, he's where they were.

And we have no examples. And of course people resent any word reflecting on them. But every once in a while there appears an awakened soul, some way or other he got awake.

Somehow God Almighty waked him, if it was by the crowing of the rooster or by the braying of Balaam's ass, he got him awake. And he arises and ceases any longer to be mediocre and somnolent, and he becomes a blazing and shining light. Then the sleeping Saints pay to have him do their work for them.

They send him out to South America or the Far East to do their work for them, and they stay home and sleep spiritually and earn the money, because they're intellectually and physically awake, to send him. When he dies, they write his life, and maybe even go so far as to take up a collection to put up a little library or something else in his memory, and call it the Waked-Up Saint Memorial. But they're very careful not to be waked up themselves.

They're very careful. They're perfectly happy to talk about how wonderful Jaffrey was, but they won't pay Jaffrey's price. They can talk endlessly about wonderful Dr. Simpson, but they will not go Simpson's way.

Very careful not to follow the man whose life they write and whose memorials they erect. I want to do something in closing that I rarely do. It involves me, and the reason it involves me is that these letters were written to me, and I wouldn't have seen them if they had been written to you or somebody else.

But I saw them, they're here. I want to read a few excerpts from two letters I received. One from a student who was a student at TBC, and another from a woman, obviously a married woman.

This boy is in Calgary, Alberta. The woman is, I'll not tell you the name of the town in Connecticut. She pledges me not to let this letter be seen.

So for ethics' sake, we're not even going to tell you the name of the town. Here were two people. I want to give you an example of what I mean when I say it's possible to be morally asleep and suddenly come alive and come awake.

It's possible to be spiritually asleep and suddenly come awake and get out of the rut. This one amuses me as well as pleases me. It's written by a young chap who has just finished at the Bible College.

It says, Dear Dr. Tozer, It hadn't been long before you arrived in Toronto that I decided to visit the Avenue Road Church. I believe it is one of the first sermons that I heard you preach. It was about having things as idols.

Things, H-I-N-G-S. The message so struck me that I decided to go through all my belongings and throw out all that I treasured. It wasn't a rash decision, but a calm, cool decision to get rid of the trash.

I am glad those things are gone and thankful to you and God for preaching that sermon that night. I don't know exactly what those things were, but I can give you some good guesses. Some time later, he says, I now attended the services at Avenue Road regularly.

After you had preached on absolute surrender, a fellow came to see you after the sermon, he's the fellow writing the letter, and told you that he couldn't and didn't have any desire to surrender. I remember the boy, about two years ago, came and said, Mr. Tozer, I'm a Christian, but I don't want to surrender. So I prayed for him that God would make him willing to be made willing to surrender.

Well, it was some months later after I knew that I should surrender and felt very unhappy that I hadn't, and there was constant friction in my heart as between two pieces of very rough sandpaper. And the unhappy thought that I would be like that, the rest of my life. So on February 2, 1962, he says to be exact, I spent from ten to twelve o'clock dedicating and surrendering everything that I had, and would have, and be to Christ my Master.

Amen. Praise the Lord. What a difference surrendering makes! Boy, it's terrific! Now, that's the good slang of a young fellow, that God had riled, had awaked.

You see what happened there? This one I read with caution and with great reverence. This is written by a woman of culture that writes beautifully and with finest English. I told her, I simply cannot resist any longer the urge to thank you.

I have spoken to God so often about it, now I have to tell you, too. Two and a half years ago, I was deeply troubled. Emptiness, meaninglessness, and most of all, guilt, were becoming burdens too heavy for me to carry.

As a lifelong Church member, I attended Church in vain, searching for the answer to my uneasiness. Then for the first time in my life, I turned to my Bible in desperation, not duty, and still I could not get through. One day I glanced over the books in our Church library, and here is where I am involved in this, and I apologize, but I can't give you the benefit of this if I don't read on.

He says, One called Pursuit of God caught my eye. I carelessly thumbed through it and was about to put it back when I saw an inscription on the fly leaf. Someone had presented it to a soldier, and the soldier had written beneath the inscription, What good is this? Only one in ten thousand knows anything about the triune God.

If we can't understand it, what good is it? Then she says, God bless that soldier, and thine infinite mercy, she prays, which uses even our pride to draw us to thee. Pleased with my own intellectual accomplishments, I accepted the challenge and brought the book home. O God, all I had been hungering for, all the secrets it seemed the Church had conspired to keep from me, were here emblazoned across my heart.

O incredible! There are no words to tell you how I felt. I read it over and over again to be sure that I had not misunderstood. Then I saw that there was no doubt.

This was what I had been looking for, and I had been sought by one who would find me if I would let him. O the incredible foolishness of God to extend himself for such as me! Now I know who had been pursuing me. God alone knows the next two weeks, but I am sure you understand.

The invitation personally extended the wrenching Abraham experience as material possessions and loved ones, and everything went. I said good-bye to them, even to my own life. For me this was not enough to push the stone from the door.

He would have our most cherished core of self, the final surrender of intellect and sanity, and all was done. After death came the astonishment, the awakening of the newborn, the burning heart, the throbbing flesh, the stifled groans, vain efforts to contain the joy so intense that it bordered on pain, love that shatters the soul till you plead, O God, for my mortal frame, I can't bear it. My heart will burst here on the sidewalk.

Now I have read this to you, one by a student, one by, I would assume, a middle-aged married woman who had attended church for years. It so happened that that little book bumped her off. It could have been something else.

It could have been a testimony, a sermon by someone, an old book she had dug out someplace, or maybe even a humble little tract. But God got hold of her. And she said, I saw then that not only must I pursue God, but all this time he had been pursuing me.

But here was the awakening. Friends, this is what Christianity is about, the awakened soul, the morally awakened, spiritually awakened. God who seemed so far away suddenly becomes close.

God who had been seen all out of focus, a blur, now is seen to be the Son of Righteousness, clear sight with healing in his wings. I read those letters in order that you might see that I'm not preaching around in a circle and there's nothing to what I'm saying. This works for a few people.

It could be more, it could be everybody. You've been in this rut long enough, says the Holy Ghost. Rise! Let's take the victory.

Now I want you to close, and I want you to do something. I want you to sing a song, our brother will announce, as though you had never heard it before. And for the musicians, please, don't play it too fast.

Let's give ourselves time to enjoy it. Not that you have been, but I merely mention that this one we want tempo just enough slow that we can get time to enjoy it. I want you to say to yourself, I've never heard this before, or act as if you haven't, or try to feel as if you haven't, and see what the Holy Ghost will say to you.

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