

(How to Get Out of a Religious Rut): Errors in Thinking

by A.W. Tozer

To get out of a rut, we need to turn to the Lord and ask what is lacking, and then compare what we are with what we could be.

Duration: 33:55

Scripture: Deuteronomy 1:6-8, Deuteronomy 11:22-23, Matthew 7:1-2, Romans 7:24-25, Romans 8:2-4, Ephesians 4:26, Ephesians 4:28 - 5:2

Topics: "Religious Rut"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses a man who is struggling and feeling unable to be the person he wants to be. However, he realizes that through Jesus Christ, he can find freedom from the law of sin and death. The preacher then references a passage from the Bible where God tells the people to leave their current situation and journey to a new land. This serves as a metaphor for getting out of a religious rut and embracing God's will for their lives. The preacher emphasizes the importance of having ambition, thirst, and longing for a deeper relationship with God, rather than settling for mediocrity.

Transcript

Deuteronomy 1st chapter, Deuteronomy 1st chapter, verses 6 to 8. 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, by the seaside, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you.

Go in, and possess the land, which the Lord sware unto your father, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them, and their seed after them. This is the second in a series of Sunday night talks on how to get out of the religious rut. Now, when God, as he in his great love and kindness often does, when God sends someone to tell us, a Moses, maybe, a Joshua, an Isaiah, or in later times, a Luther, or a Wesley, when God sends someone to say to us, the work of the Lord is not progressing.

Times are bad in the kingdom, and getting worse. You have settled into a rut, and you've got to get out of it, and it's time for you to arise and go on from here, because my will for you is as broad as the high mountain yonder, and the hill, and the plain, and the vale, and the south, and the seaside, and Lebanon,

and all the land is before you. I say, when God sends somebody, maybe not somebody as well-known as Luther or a Wesley, maybe some simple preacher in a little church in some small town in Ontario or Michigan, but when God sends some preacher to say this to a congregation, and the congregation is even half ready to listen to him, and they say to themselves, I think the pastor is right about this, we are in a rut, aren't we? We used to fight it.

We are. We've been more or less in a rut. I think we ought to do something about this.

Then you know what, 99-100 percent of the time, you know what the answer will be or the remedy that will be prescribed? It will be, let's come together and eat something. Say, I know we're in a rut. You don't see each other often enough, and we ought to get to know each other better and get warmer and fresher.

Let's come together and eat something. Now, I don't mind that. I guess I've eaten my way through several pounds of food around here since I've been here in the last two and a half years, so you know I don't object to coming together and eating something.

But what I'm pointing out is that this isn't the answer to what's wrong with it. Or, if they don't say, let's come together and eat something, they say, let's make plans and go somewhere. That's another way we Protestants have of curing all the sores and job and all the leprosy and everything that's wrong with it.

We either get together to eat our way out, or else we travel and get out of it. Or we say, let's come together and do something religious. I know, I'm sure the Church is in a pretty bad state, and the morale is low, and things aren't where they ought to be, and we're running pretty much in a circle.

Let's get together here and get active and do something. That's activism. Or they say, let's form a committee to consider it.

You know what the Baptist preacher Vance Hadner said about a committee? He said, a committee is a company of the incompetent, chosen by the unwilling to do the unnecessary. I think maybe that he had that thing a little radically stated, but there are some things committees can do, and then there are things committees can't do. And I'm quite sure that when the man of God here thundered, you've dwelt long enough in this mouth, you were going around in circles, get you out and take what's given to you by the hand of your God.

I'm quite certain that nobody got up and said, Mr. Chairman, let's eat something. I'm quite sure that I wouldn't have helped any if they had. And I'm quite certain they didn't get up and say, let's take a trip.

Or that they didn't say, let's form a committee to handle it. Or that they didn't say, let's start another club. That's another way we have when we find ourselves in a rut, that we find we're no taller than we were five years ago, we're no further along than we were five years ago, we don't know any more than we did five years ago, we're not any holier than we were five years ago, and we simply meet ourselves coming around, and if you could wear out songs, we'd have worn out the same old songs, revive us again in each heart with thy love.

Sometimes when I hear that I want to go cry on my own shoulder. We've sung that song and nobody means it, nobody would pay the price, but here we've gone round and round, and all we see is the other fellow's heels just ahead of us, and all the fellow behind us sees our heels. And here we go round and round and round the circle.

And so somebody says, let's start a club now. Now clubs are all right I suppose, all kinds of clubs are all right under the right circumstances, but what I'm trying to point out here is, brethren, that this kind of an answer to that kind of a problem presupposes that those who give the answer have misunderstood the problem. You see, they've misunderstood three things.

They've misunderstood the nature of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is inward and not outward. It's of the spirit and not of the flesh.

The kingdom of God is within you, and Christ dwelleth in your heart except you to reprobate, and Christ in you the hope of glory is the burning core of the Christian faith. So the Christianity, the true Christian faith is the inwardness of it all, that we're to be inwardly Christians, and it's in our inwards there somewhere, in the spirit, the soul, the heart, the inner man that we get into the rut. And so because it is, you see how ridiculous it is to say, all right, the inner man, the spirit of me, the inner shrine of me is in a rut.

It isn't where it ought to be. Therefore, let's eat something. Well, brother, you can just eat caviar and hummingbird tongues until the sun goes down, and it won't help you because that isn't what's wrong with you.

Somebody else says, let's take a trip. Take your trip, it's all right. Try not to get killed on the way, but remember that isn't what's wrong with you.

Somebody else says, let's start a committee to handle it. That isn't what's wrong with you. You're missing the nature of the true Christian faith, which is inward, and what's wrong can't be reached by these external things.

And then somebody else would say, let's come together to eat, let's go together to play, let's do something else. We don't misunderstand the nature of the church because, you see, the church is a body of individuals united in Christ, but having separate individual responsibilities. And the body can be improved only as we improve the individual that composed the body.

You see, the Holy Ghost fell at Pentecost on 120 people approximately, the scripture says, but it fell on them individually. And each individual, if one man had hardened himself there, he would have been passed over. Each individual.

We're born individually, even if we're triplets. We're born one at a time, and we die one at a time, and we face judgment one at a time. And if we're sick Christians, we'll be cured one at a time.

The body is composed of individuals. And for us to say, all right, let's form a committee to look into it. You're trying to do by a dozen men what God can do for one man.

Doesn't work, never will work. Because we misunderstand the trouble, we misunderstand what's wrong with us. We misunderstand the nature of the Church.

And then thirdly, we misunderstand what is wrong with us. First, what the nature of the Church is. Second, what the nature of Christianity is.

And third, what is wrong with us. You can't cure a weak member by prescribing medicine that is no good. Or suppose now that there were a dozen men, or suppose there was a Church that by some means or other, every member had leukemia.

That would be a terrible thing to contemplate, but you're allowed anything in the illustration. So suppose that there were a hundred members in the Church, and they all had leukemia in various stages of progression. And all of them, every one of them had leukemia, which you know is sort of a cancer of the blood.

They were all Christians, but they all had leukemia. And here they were all gathered around, and somebody said, You know what's wrong with you boys? You've lost. You remember Lou Gehrig, the great baseball player who played 1,200 and some games without missing one, and was called the Iron Man of baseball? One day he came to the manager and said, Skipper, I think you ought to bench me.

Well, he said, Why? Bench you? You're running for a record. You've played longer and more games consecutively than any other man, yes. But he said, I don't feel right.

I feel weak. And he was a great horse of a fellow, handsome in the face and strong shoulders, and a great, fine fellow. But he said, I don't feel right.

He said, My feet are dragging. I'm not fast on my feet anymore, and my eye's not good. He said, I think for the good of the team you'd better bench me.

So they benched him. And he began to go downhill, and was soon dead. He had leukemia.

And suppose now that we all have it, a hundred of us have it, and we're a church, and we say, somebody says, I don't know, I don't have the zips I ought to have as a Christian. I don't have the zeal I ought to have. I don't have, something's wrong here.

Everybody's got the same thing. All right. Now, how are we going to cure it? Somebody says, Let's eat.

All right, but that doesn't cure it, you see, brother. You can't eat your way out of leukemia. And somebody else says, Let's form a committee to consider it here.

It'll all die while you're sitting around moving and seconded and debating and passing. And somebody else says, All right, let's go somewhere. All right, go somewhere else and die, or else die here because you've all got leukemia.

And we're all feet are dragging. And the Lord's benched some of us. I'm sure of that.

All right. Individuals have got to be cured, and you can't do it the way the churches try to do it. So as we go on the philosophy of externalism, and externalism is not the heart of Christianity, but internalism.

I repeat, it's of the spirit. God is spirit, and those that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. Again, I repeat that the church is composed of individuals, and it's the individual that must get cured.

If the individual is weak and anemic and dragging, he's got to get cured. The lonely, serious individual. And it's a painful thing, and it isn't anything you can do by jocularity and jokes and slaps on the back and cute choruses.

It isn't anything that can be handled that way. It's a deep thing. It's a lonely thing.

It's something that the man has to meet God for in the loneliness of his spirit. Now, suppose we're ready to admit that we're in a rut. And we ask, and the individual asks, you see, the church can't ask anything.

That's a mistake. They say, well, but what's your church doing? I don't know. I don't know because it's the individual that matters.

See, the church is composed of this fellow that lives out here a little way, and those two people that live out here in Scarborough, and the five that live out in Reckdale, and the seven that live up here in Willowdale, and the 14 that live out here in the east. Well, that's the church. And so what the church does is what the individual does.

How well or how sick the church is depends upon how well or how sick that individual is. In other words, it depends upon how you are. Now, we come to the Lord and say, O Lord, what lack I yet? What is it? I have some things, but Lord, what I lack, or what is it that I ought to get rid of? What is it, Lord? What am I compared with what I should be? What am I compared with what I should be? How am I going to know what I should be? All right, let's turn over here to a passage of scripture.

Now, I know some of the brethren rule this out, but I'll just let them rule it out. I don't care. They say the sermon on the mount isn't for us.

Somebody thought that one up, and I think I know who it was, but I'm not going to name him in a nice meeting like this. But I'm sure that traditionally he has horns and a tail. I don't mean that everybody that teaches that have horns and tails, for God's poor dumb sheep pick up anything along the way and teach it.

Listen. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they that mourn.

Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are they that are persecuted.

Then he says, Let your light so shine before men. He says, You have heard it said thou shalt not kill, but I say to you that if a man's angry with his brother without cause, he is in danger of the judgment. You have heard it said you shall not commit adultery, but I say unto you that if you steal a glance at a woman with a lustful desire, you have already committed adultery as far as you are concerned.

And you say, it's been said by those of old time, for swear not thyself, but I say to you, swear not at all. You have heard it said an eye for an eye, but I say to you if any man smite you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. Take heed that you do not your arms before men to be seen of them.

Now that's what we ought to be, you see. I can't read it all, but this tells us what a Christian would be like, or ought to be like, if he's a true Christian. And judge not that you be not judged, for with what judgment you judge you shall be judged.

Then go on into the epistles and see what the man of God has to say there. He says, Be angry and sin not, let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Ye that give place to the devil, let him that stole steal no more.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth. Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you're sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you.

Be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be therefore followers of God as dear children, who walk in love as Christ also hath loved us. Now this is what we ought to be.

This is the way we ought to be living. And so that's what when we say, Lord, what lack I yet? And the Holy Ghost said, This is what you lack. And then compared with what I could be, not only compared with what I should be, but with what I could be.

Always remember this, that God being who he is, and Jesus Christ being his risen and all powerful Son, anything you ought to be, you can be. Remember that. Anything that God has declared you should be, you can be.

For listen, look again in the scripture here where it tells us in the book of Romans, that wonderful book of Romans, the greatest and profoundest book probably in the Bible or in the world. Here's the 7th chapter that tells us of a man who's struggling and wanting to be something that he feels he can't be, and giving up and saying, Oh, wretched man, what am I to do? And then immediately he says, I thank God I know what to do through Jesus Christ our Lord. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

For what the law could not do when it was weak to the flesh, God sending its son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin condemns him in the flesh. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. And over in the book of Galatians in the 5th chapter, we read there that the 5th chapter we read there that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, and against such there is no law.

And that if we walk in the spirit we shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Now that's what we ought to be and what we can be. Now compare that with what we are.

And if we compare what we ought to be with what we are and what we could be with what we are, and we don't see that we're in a rut and we're not concerned, then one of three things may be wrong. First, maybe we've not been converted at all, because I'm convinced that a lot of evangelicals and I get abused for the word evangelicals, I even got a letter which I dictated the answer to from an evangelical Lutheran pastor out in, I don't remember the town, in British Columbia. And he was nice about it and he said the magazine was a wonderful magazine, he got help from it, but he wanted to know why I was always acting as if the alliance were the evangelicals.

I don't believe the alliance people are the only evangelicals. I think we are a small segment of a large body. But I believe we are evangelicals, but I think that among the evangelicals it's entirely possible to come into membership to ooze in by osmosis, to leak through the cells of the church, into the church and never know what it is to be born of the spirit washed in the blood.

I believe that's entirely possible. I want to say something else to you. I get invited around among the Baptists and even Lutherans preaching on the deeper life, among the Holy Spirit, and I go and I preach for them, but I'll tell you something.

I am afraid that a great deal that passes for the deeper life is nothing more nor less than simple Christianity. And there's nothing deeper about it, and it's where we should have been all the time. We should have been happy, joyous, victorious Christians walking in the Holy Ghost and not fulfilling the lusts

of the flesh, but we haven't been.

We've been running around, chasing each other around the perpetual mount. And then they say, let's have Tord over and preach on the deeper life. Well, what we need is, I think, to go off and just claim getting converted.

What the old Methodists called, what did they call it? A sound conversion. Yes, a sound conversion. The difference between conversions, you know, and a sound conversion.

Well, either he's never been converted and so has not the spiritual enlightenment, and when you read the Sermon on the Mount or the Tordatory passages of the Epistles that tell a man how to live, and the doctrinal passages that tell him how he can live, when you read them, he's not affected by them because the spirit that wrote them isn't witnessing in his heart because he himself hasn't been born in spirit. That often happens. People clean up, throw their pipe away, and start to pay their bills and live right.

And then say, I want to join the church. Do you believe that Christ is the Son of God? Yes. So does the devil.

Yes. So does the devil. Do you believe he rose from the dead? Yes.

So does the devil. Do you believe he's come again? Sure, so does the devil. And he trembles.

And so we get people into our church that aren't converted at all. And we're so tender-hearted and sentimental and eager to have them in that we get them in on any grounds at all if they just say the right words for us. But maybe this fellow's never been converted.

Maybe. He has been regenerated, but he's sinned against light too often, so the light within him has become darkness. And that often happens.

I don't say the man's lost, but I do say that he's in a terrible state, and only the power and grace of God working within him can help him. But I think there are lots of people like that. They've been regenerated, but they've gotten busy with their real estate office, or they've gotten busy with their store.

Many a man's told me, well, I'd like to come to your church, Reverend, but I have to keep my store open seven days a week. And so they can't serve God because they don't have time to serve God. They'll have time to die, but they don't have time to serve God.

Or, maybe, thirdly, he's so self-righteous that he's impervious to any work of the Holy Ghost, to any penetrating so he can't be cured of his blindness because he thinks he sees. I want to say something to you tonight that I never said before that I remember in my long ministry. And if you'll only remember this, it'll be worth you coming to church to hear.

It is this. The Pharisees never got under conviction. Remember that? The Pharisees never got under conviction.

They crucified Christ, they hated the Lord, the Son of God, but they never got under conviction. They had so ordered their religious life as to be impervious to the arrows of the Holy Ghost. The adulterous woman could fall at the feet of Jesus.

The publican who knew he'd been crooked could run to the feet of Jesus and ask for help. The poor, they could come from everywhere and say, What must I do? They could come, but Pharisees never did. They never got under conviction.

This terrible, terrible, terrible thing. And I suppose in hell they're still fighting and saying they're right. But they're in hell.

So it's possible if a man judges what he could be and what he ought to be with what he is and still can go home and have a good night's rest and shrug this off and laugh it all off, maybe he's never been converted. Maybe he's sinned against life until he's temporarily under a terrible cloud of God's judgment. Maybe he's so self-righteous that he can't get under conviction.

Remember the Pharisee, he never did. But if he's concerned, wounded by the Spirit's sword and is deeply satisfied with the religious wrath, there's hope. Remember, complacency is a deadly foe.

Complacency is just as great a foe as any other carnal malady, any other fleshly manifestation. To be complacent, to have no desire to get anywhere. During the Great War, I used to travel an awful lot, and of course it was hard to get on the trains and hard to get off of them.

I've gone a whole day on the trains without eating, couldn't eat until 8 o'clock at night because of the soldiers and sailors and marines and the rest that were on. I'm speaking of the States mainly because while I traveled some in Canada, I'm thinking of where I traveled most in the United States. And you know what I saw? I saw those bored, homesick, tired boys traveling all over the continent, and you know what they were reading? You know, comic books.

They had them worn out, passing them from G.I. to G.I. Worn out. And they said it feels, not in a sermon, but I've said to you, if communism finally prevails and a country like mine goes down, it'll go down because her people were too mentally lazy to think or to study or to read much more than comic books. The fellas now who are the businessmen and the politicians and are running the life of the country, when a few years back they read comic books.

They traveled so much, if they'd carried the right books, they could have had a college education just reading. They wouldn't do it. I say there's no excuse for this whatsoever.

And I suppose the same is true in a great many other lands. There was an Englishman, a celebrated Englishman, who sat with a friend once, watching and listening to a philharmonic orchestra. And as they listened, this celebrated Englishman watched a man play the violin.

He was playing second violin. He was playing it well, but he was playing second violin. And this great Englishman shrugged his shoulders and smiled and said to his friend, you see that man there playing second violin? He said, yes.

He said, if I were playing second violin in that orchestra, do you know what I'd do? I would never rest day or night until I was playing first violin. And then he said to this great man, if I got to playing second violin, do you know what I'd do? He said, no. He said, I would never give myself rest day or night until I was directing the orchestra.

And he said, when I got to be director, I'd never rest until I had become a composer. And when I got to composing music for the orchestra, I'd never give myself rest until I was the best composer in England.

The sons of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of life.

We have been offered not the directorship of a great orchestra. We have been offered not a place in Ottawa or Washington to be a great engineer. We have been offered glory, glory and truth unsearchable.

We have been offered the face of God in the glory of Christ. We have been offered holiness and righteousness and to be indwelt by the spirit, to have our prayers answered, to have hell fear us because we have a hold on God and God invites us to his omnipotence. We're offered all this.

And we sit and play the second violin without ambition, without thirst, without yearning, without desire, without longing. Israel one time, and I'm finished, was in that condition. And a hairy old prophet with shining eyes came to him and said, Woe to them that are ye in Zion and that trust in the mountain of Samaria, ye that put away from you the evil day and caused the seat of violence to come near, that lie upon beds of ivory and that stretch themselves upon their couches and eat the lambs out of the flock and the calves out of the stall, chant to the sound of the vial and invent instruments of music to themselves, that drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with tea-pointing, but they're not afflicted, did not grieve for the affliction of Joseph.

Therefore, said the shaggy old prophet, now shall they go captive with the first that go captive. They were in a rush and they didn't want anybody disturbing their calm. They liked music and food and beds of ivory and they anointed themselves with tea-pointing.

They had everything that we call now sumptuous living. They had it, but they weren't aggrieved for the affliction of the church. They didn't care.

Brethren, if I thought an appreciable number of you people were like that and that I could not reach you, I would hand my resignation into the board this week. I don't think so. I have a new hope, ladies and gentlemen.

I've got my teeth in now somehow, rather, and a new grip in my spirit. I believe God is going to do something for our new old church. I believe we're not only going to see it numerically come up, I believe we're going to see it spiritually come up.

And I serve notice on you that drag your feet and insist upon going around the mountain and have no desire to go anywhere. We're going to snow you under. We're going to get hold of the truth, and we're going to go someplace here.

And we're going to go right, and we're going to go without circuses. We're going to go the way New Testament churches should go. And there'll be people so blessed, new converts, and people so blessed that haven't been in the kingdom long, and you'll wonder why you've been in 50 years, and you're where you are.

So may God help us. Let's not rest upon beds of ivory. Let's thank God that we have a bed of ivory and sleep on it at night, and then let's get up in the morning.

And by the grace of God, let's begin to grieve a bit for the affliction of Joseph. And be anxious and bothered in the Holy Ghost for the state the churches are, not only this church, but all God's people everywhere. We're so desperately in need of revival.

I believe he will send it. I expect it. Brother McNally, let's pray.

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