

(How to Get Out of a Religious Rut): Getting Out of the Rut

by A.W. Tozer

To get out of a religious rut, we must work with God through faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His words, rather than relying on human methods or trying to manipulate God.

Duration: 30:54

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 14:21, John 14:23-24, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 2:12-13

Topics: "Religious Rut"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher tells a story about a farmer boy who wants to catch fish. The boy remembers that the pastor said to pray for what he wants, so he prays for fish. The preacher then goes on to discuss the idea of Christians being in a religious rut and how to get out of it. He emphasizes that God is the one who initiates change in our lives and that we need to work with God to work out our salvation. The preacher uses Bible verses to support his points and encourages the audience to seek a deeper relationship with God.

Transcript

Verses 12 and 13. Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Now, over the last weeks I have been trying to show, and I have yet some sermons left, some quiver, arrows left in my quiver, on how to get out of the religious rut. And I have tried to show that most Christians are in a religious rut. Now, you heard me when I said that, and I am not backing out nor modifying it.

Most Christians, most evangelical Christians, most Christians who know they have been born again, are nevertheless in a religious rut. And because Christians are, therefore, churches which are made up of Christians, are also in the religious rut. Now, that is a premise.

I state that and don't apologize for it, nor in any wise modify it. And I have tried to show why we are in a religious rut, and I have tried to show that we must get out of it, and how. Now, tonight I have read two texts in your hearing, or really two texts, or therefore one passage of scripture.

And the Holy Ghost in this scripture says two things. God works in you to will, but that and you are to work with God in working it out. Now, there are the two passages.

It is God who worketh in you to will. Therefore, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. God works in you.

That is, God is always previous. God is the aggressor. God saw you in the rut and wanted you to get out of it, and he thought of it first, not you.

And the impulse to know God came from him and not from you. God worketh first. And because God works, therefore we are to work with him.

You are, therefore, to dismiss all doubts and all morbid humility. You see, it's entirely possible to be so humble in a sick kind of way that you paralyze yourself and get nowhere. For instance, you say to yourself, Now that man has been preaching about getting out of the religious rut.

And while I haven't agreed with everything he's said, I have been feeling that I am in a rut and that I ought to get out. This circular grave is getting deeper every year in my life, and I can hardly see over it. Give me four or five more years, and you look right over me and won't know I'm there.

I need help. But I am wondering whether God will help me or not. And that is morbid humility, you see, because if we knew the truth, we'd know that you had gone right on around in that circular grave until you'd worn your way down to China and never thought of getting out of it at all.

The very fact that you want out of it is proof that God has been working in you to will to get out. And if God works in you to want to get out, then when you ask him to get out, do you suppose that he will help you out? Would God put an impulse in your breast and then refuse to accept your prayer when you came in answer to that impulse? Would a mother bring a hungry baby to the table and prepare its food, and then when it let out its happy little yell and stretched out its hand, pull it away and say, You're no good, you've never done anything anyhow, you're no... Now, if you grant the baby, grant the baby your intelligence, if it is intelligence, grant the baby your intelligence, and here's the way the baby would act or what it would say to itself. The baby would say, I am now eight months old and I haven't helped my mother at all and I've been bad sometimes.

I've kept her up at night. Even Daddy had to get out once or twice. And I obviously am no good.

I'm not making any contribution to society. I'm just no place. Now, why should I think that Mother is going to feed me? But Mother in the meantime is begging him to eat.

And he says there's no use. Now, that would be morbid humility. Of course, no baby would have that much intelligence.

It would just grab for what was in front of it, which is exactly what God wants you to do. If God hadn't put it in your heart to want his blessing, you wouldn't have wanted it. You'd have been down here seeing the Toronto football team get clobbered today.

You wouldn't even have been here tonight. You'd have been home resting up in the excitement. You wouldn't have even been here.

But the fact that you're here and the fact that you're ready to listen to this kind of preaching indicates that God has been previous in your life. Therefore, you must work with him in harmonious cooperation so that God can work in you and for you and through you. You know, the word fanatic is the word that people use whenever you get a little bit joyful about the Lord.

They say you're a fanatic. Webster says a fanatic is somebody who is too enthusiastic about religion as if you could be too enthusiastic about religion. John Wesley, while he was not a philologist, he was a theologian, and he said that a fanatic is one who seeks desirable ends but ignores constituted means.

Let me illustrate for you. There was a farmer boy with his blue jeans and his torn shirt and his tattered straw hat. He wants to get a fish.

His mother says, Why don't you go down and catch a couple of trout, son? So he goes down for the beautiful day, the sun shining, and the cows are standing deep in the water and in the shade trees, under the shade trees, and it's just a lovely day. And so he pulls off a stalk of grass and begins to nibble it, as I've done, I guess, a hundred thousand times when I was on the farm, and begins to wonder about those fish. And he says, Now, I remember the pastor said, If you want anything, pray for it.

In the meantime, the fish were breaking the surface, begging to be caught. There they were. And he said, I remember that the pastor said pray for it.

So he turns over, often before he was lying so easy on the grass, and begins to pray like a house on fire, Lord, send me some fish. Well, he can pray till he dies, and he'll never have any fish, because the Lord put intelligence in his head and gave him what we call the constituted means. And to the farm boy, and I've done it many times, you take a stick which you cut off the tree, you take an ordinary piece of cord, you can get anywhere, and you put a bent pin on the end, if you don't have the nickel to get the hook, and you throw it in with a worm on it.

And the fish will take it. Fish are so dumb in the country, they'll take it. Now, here is what I mean.

Would the thing be for the boy to be very pious and pray for a mess of fish, or throw in his hook and pull out a mess of fish? Why, everybody knows if you go down and hear a loud voice addressing the Almighty God, and you get near to him, and he was a country boy praying for fish, with fish breaking the surface, begging to be caught, you'd go away and say something wrong there. Of course, he's a fanatic. He is trying to get a desirable end, but he's ignoring the constituted means.

Now, suppose his father, who also attended a church, where you have this very fine pastor who tells them they pray, they'll get what they prayed for, and he wants potatoes in springtime. And he says, I'd like to have a good field of potatoes this year, I really need them. So he gets down on his knees, and every day he spends praying for potatoes, while it gets too late to plant potatoes.

The potatoes down in the basement waiting to be cut and planted are stretching out their long roots towards the sunlight, and all they're begging is for him to use the constituted means, plow the field, get it in shape, cut his potatoes, and plant them. Go around occasionally, keep the weeds down, and come back in the fall and take out a great crop. Constituted means, you see.

Or suppose that the lady of the house, I don't know why I picked on the country tonight, but suppose the lady of the house wants some ducks. She just has a yin for a hat full of ducklings. She loves a little yellow fella, she says, she wants some ducklings.

So down on her knees she gets and prays for ducks day and night. She's not using the constituted means. The way you get ducks is to get fertile duck eggs and put them under our hands.

Four weeks they're out. If they're chickens, they're out in three weeks. But if they're ducks, they're out in four weeks.

Duck comes slower. And so four weeks the ducks are out. The way to get ducks is to get duck eggs and set them.

Now I've gone way around Robin Hood's red barn to illustrate what a fanatic is. A fanatic is somebody who is seeking desirable ends but ignoring constituted means. Seeking to get out of the religious rut is a desirable end.

It is right and it is in the will of God. But trying to do it in a manner which is not according to God's constituted means is all wrong and we never get anywhere. Some try when they want to get blessed, they try by getting worked up psychologically.

They work it up by psychological means. And there are some men who are, maybe they've not studied psychology, but they're master psychologists. And they know how to manipulate audiences.

And they know just how to lower the voice and when to raise it and when to make it sound very sad and all the rest. And they can just get people all worked up. I sat listening to a fellow one time and right across catty-corner from me was a young woman, maybe 22 or 23 years old.

Nice looking lady. She sat there. And the only reason I noticed her tall was she had on glass shoes.

You ever see them? Well, maybe they were plastic. But anyway, I noticed the funny shoes sticking out in the aisle. And this fellow went on preaching and he never, as far as I remember, said anything about the Lord.

But he told us all about his father and his mother and his father leaving home and the whole thing. And I watched this lady idly as I would watch him and look at her. And at first she couldn't have cared less.

But slowly he got a hold of her. And when he came to the point where the evangelist said in a tremulous voice that every time he faced an audience he hoped that his old father might be there. Well, the girl broke down into pieces, you know.

And I saw from that time she was eating out of his hand. He knew how to handle her psychologically. And he got her.

All right. He'd have done anything for her. You don't know that evangelist, I'm sure.

It wasn't Billy Graham, God bless you. So don't get mad and go out and throw him out and tell him he'll never come back. Billy Graham wouldn't spook to that.

But some do. Now, some try by group dynamics Have you heard about group dynamics? We all sit around together and practice togetherness. And by practicing togetherness we finally work up some spirituality.

Brother and sister, I remember sitting around a table when I was a kid, my aunt Adeline, Abby they called her, Aunt Abby. She weighed, oh, roughly speaking 200, 210. And she was a lovely soul and sweet.

But she came with the idea that if you would put your hands together around a table that you could tip the table. And I put my paddies down there around my mother and some others and my Aunt Abby. And bless my heart, it tipped all right.

There's no question about it. I'm not fooling you, it tipped. It tipped and then somebody said, sit on it.

Somebody sat on it and they couldn't move it. It tipped. We were practicing togetherness.

You see. Togetherness. You used to have Ouija boards and you got around togetherness.

Brothers and sisters, sometimes I wonder where they're going to lead us yet. We need some old-fashioned, salty horse saints. And I'm sure that there are 189 youths in the state of Missouri that are God-worshipping saints and a lot of these fellows who are trying to teach how to get the blessing of God in some other way than the constituted means.

And when you do get people all broken up, dabbing at their eyes and shaking, when you do, what's the result? Well, it doesn't bring us any closer to God, it doesn't make us love God any better, which is the first commandment, and it doesn't give us any greater love for our neighbor, which is the second commandment. It doesn't prepare us to live truthfully on earth, which is most important, and it doesn't prepare us to die victoriously, and it doesn't guarantee that we'll be with our Lord at the last. The Lord has constituted means.

Now, it's a little late, but I'm going to just touch it. Listen, our Lord said in the 14th chapter of John, He that has my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. Now, anybody can understand that, even a teacher of group dynamics.

And he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him. If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our boat with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings, and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father which sent me.

Now, what our Lord taught there was this. Our Lord taught that when we obey the words of Jesus in faith and in love, when we obey the words of Jesus, we prove that we love him, and he shows himself to us. There are two subjects acting here, we and he.

When we obey his words, we prove that we love him. And he shows himself to us. But who is this he that I'm talking about? Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The divinely constituted means then are two. Faith, a right kind of faith, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and obedience to his words. Now, faith in our Lord Jesus, we believe in God, said Jesus, believe also in me.

Now, faith in Jesus Christ, the right kind of faith, the only kind of faith that matters, is irrevocable, total commitment to the person of Jesus Christ himself. Total commitment, which is irrevocable. That is, you can't go back on it.

And it is total, and there's nothing that isn't included. So faith in Jesus, then, is not gulping twice and saying, I accept Jesus. It is getting into a state where you have totally committed yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith.

Now, not to your denomination. I don't mind telling you plainly, I don't mind telling you, that I wouldn't spend five minutes trying to persuade you people that the Christian and Missionary Alliance is the greatest society in the world. I wouldn't.

And if I thought that I would make a denominationalist out of you or a sectarian, so that you would get the notion that outside of the Alliance, people are second-class Christians, I couldn't now. I wouldn't carry on. Faith is not commitment to your denomination.

It is irrevocable commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. And it is not commitment to your church. I believe in the local church.

I'm not a tabernacle man. I believe in the local church. I believe in the divine assembly.

And I believe that we ought, as a group, realize that we are, as Christians, a divine assembly, a cell in the body of Christ, alive with his life. But for one second would I not, for one second would I try to create in you a faith that would lead you to commit yourself irrevocably to a local church, nor to your church leaders? I complained one time to a great good man that I couldn't make followers. I said, I don't know, people won't follow me.

He said, you ought to thank God that you're not up there to get people to follow you. You're up there to present the Lord Jesus Christ and ask them to follow him. So you're not asked to follow your church leaders.

You're not asked like a little robin on the nest to open your blessed innocent little mouth and just take anything I put in. If what I put in isn't biblical food, regurgitate. Don't be afraid to do it.

Call me or come to see me. Write me an anonymous letter. If you write me an anonymous letter, you won't get an answer, remember that.

But do something about it. Don't by any means swallow what your leaders give you. Here's the book.

Here's the Bible. Go to it. So faith is faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son, a total faith in Christ and not in the denomination or the church, though you love the church and you respect and love your leaders and you're glad to work along with an evangelical denomination.

But your commitment is to Christ. Now, that's faith. Then obedience we talked about.

We prove we love him and he shows himself to us. But you say there are so many commandments, so many words, how do I know? How can I remember and how can I be sure? Well, in faith and love you rest and wait and look. And then as his teaching touches your life, you conform to them.

You see, there are some teachings of the Lord Jesus that you'd never get into while the world stands because they wouldn't touch you. It wouldn't impinge upon you in your present state. But as soon as it does touch you, then you just automatically and sweetly and quietly obey it.

A man was telling about giving a testimony to being shipwrecked and praying and the Lord delivered him from shipwreck. And a dear old man of God, dear young man of God, then went home and went on his knees and wept before the Lord. Oh, God! He said, You never saved me from shipwreck.

And the Lord said, Son, have you ever been at sea? And he said, No. Of course, you can't save a man from shipwreck who's never been off the shore. And so there are things that don't touch you.

But the moment they touch you, instantly, of course, right then. For instance, there's what to do with your children. If you don't have any children, don't worry.

Husbands obey you. I mean, wives obey your husband. All right, if you don't have any husband, why worry about that? But wherever the words of our Lord Jesus touch your life, instantly, because you're totally committed, you gladly and quietly obey and you do what you're told.

He says that's your part. His part is to manifest himself to you and get you out of the rut. Now I want to give you some examples.

From Luke, and I'll be very brief about it, because it's already late enough. But listen. In the meantime, when they were gathered together, in a numeral company of people, they came to Jesus, and Jesus said to them, verse 2, 12, Luke, So there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known.

Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light, and whatever is spoken in the earth shall be proclaimed upon the house top. Now what that teaches us is, we are to be as candid and transparent as can be. No secretiveness, no defensiveness, but be completely open and candid as a Quaker.

Now that's the teaching of Jesus. And so instead of getting down on your knees and saying, Oh, Lord, get me these fish. Catch some fish, brother.

Obeys the Lord. Do what you're told. Use the Constituted means.

Be candid. Put away that carefree, cultivated, North American defensiveness. Don't be so afraid.

You're not so bad. And you don't have to be afraid to let people know who you are and what you are. Let down your hair, so to speak.

When I use that expression, of course, I use it in a modified sense about myself. But let down your hair and just be yourself. The Lord said, Be children.

We've just all become children here. How beautiful it would be. You wouldn't walk up on the defense and shake a man's hand and blink like this, wondering now.

And though I know Judo well enough to handle him, he's not going to hurt you. Christians here aren't going to hurt anybody. So just be perfectly candid.

Now, there's one passage. You can practice that no matter who you are, nor worry. That touches you right now.

Then look at this one. I say unto you, Be not afraid of them that kill the body. After that I know more they can do.

But I'll forewarn you whom it shall fear. Fear him that's able to kill the body and toll in hell. Now, here's your teaching.

Don't be afraid in your Christian life. Put away fear and live absolutely without fear. Then go on to this passage.

Whoever will confess me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels. But he that denies me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. Here we have a passage that tells us that we are boldly to testify and witness to our Lord Jesus.

If some of you would begin quietly to witness for your work, quietly to witness, you'll find the change coming over you. It says to do it here. He that hath my words and keepeth them, he loveth me, and I'll show myself to him.

You'll get out of the rut when the Lord begins to manifest himself to you. But you'd rather maybe go off somewhere, get down on your knees and pray. Now, pray right.

I've taught and preached and practiced praying since I was converted at the age of 17. But the point is, don't try to pray down something that the Lord's telling you to do. Do what you're told and the Lord will be right with you.

Then instead of begging, you can thank. Then in verse 15, take heed and beware of covetousness. He gives a little story of the man who was a covetous man and he lost his soul.

So don't be covetous, be a generous man. Don't be stingy, be free with your money. Don't be afraid, thank the Lord and trust him and put fear away.

And don't be afraid to witness, tell people you love the Lord and he'll tell the angels he loves you. Now, that's found in Luke. And I just mention that as samples of what I mean when I say that the Constituted means our faith and obedience.

Now, we sing this and don't know we're singing it. We sing, trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. We sing that, but we've sung it so long that we might as well sing Mother Goose.

Because we don't know what we're singing. What we're saying is what I've preached tonight. Have faith in Jesus Christ and obey his teachings and he'll take care of the rest.

That's Christianity, brother, that's it. Now, if you're in the rut, and oh, brother, how far some of us are in the spiritual rut, old routine, old routine. Nothing has any taste to it.

Some churches try to handle that by by pandering to the taste, bring in every kind of weird claptrap in order to get some of the poor half-dead people to get a little taste again. Oh, how my mother used to get sick when I was a kid. Green apples, you know, green grapes, she'd get sick, I should have been.

But Mother didn't know that, she loved me, so she'd stay up with me all night while I'd groan with a stomachache. And then when I'd get better, I couldn't be, no, no, I don't want anything. That poor woman would tempt me with everything.

She'd open a can of this and she'd cook that and she'd bring me broth. I kind of enjoyed, you know, being a martyr. Now, I'm not hungry, Mother.

But she did everything to get me to eat. I should have, if she'd known what she should have known, and Mother's love had been, if Mother's wisdom had been as great as her love, she'd have said, just lie there and you're off. I'd have come around after a while.

But you know, the churches are just like that. Here there's an old deacon, you know, and he's been on the same old circular grave so long he can't see over. So in order to get him out, you know, and get a grin on his face, he'll bring in anything, anything from everywhere.

I will. And this church won't as long as I have anything to say in it. We have God.

We have Christ. We have truth. We have a well-needing health.

We have the saints. We have the power of prayer. We have the joy of obedience.

We have the sweet wonder of his presence. We have the joy of Christian songs. We have all wisdom.

We don't need God. We have God God. And all we have to do is trust in his Son, Jesus Christ, and begin to obey the truth.

And the Lord will manifest himself and show himself through the lamps. You'll come running to church someday and say, I'm going to have a testimony with you tonight. I'm bursting.

God's been met me today and blessed my soul that I don't think I can keep it. What happens, you fanatic? No. You use the constituted means to get a desirable end.

You obeyed and you cussed it, and whoever cussed and obeyed says the song, the Lord will be with you and bless you. Well, that's everything for me tonight. Pray for me.

I preach every night at a conference down in New York City this week. Then, Lord, help me. I haven't any sense at all.

I promised a church here. I'd park back at church on Saturday night. I'd preach until then.

On Sunday, I'll preach right here. On Monday, I'll go to another conference and preach tomorrow. But I love it.

And when I'm not feeling very well, all I have to do is preach, and I'll feel all right. So you pray for me, won't you? And we'll trust God together. In the meantime, our good friend here will get ahead of things.

I said to somebody, boy, he not only doesn't need to be pushed, he pushes me. That's what I'm after. That's the kind of man my heart goes out to.

So he'll be on tap. Pray that they help him. Pray with him.

Not run your errands, but do any spiritual thing that you need. Then we come up to our wonderful convention, and we're having some of the finest speakers. It ought to be a great fall.

I'm looking forward to it with all the cool and delight myself. Brother McNally, would you lead us in a closing song?

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