

(How to Get Out of a Religious Rut): Three Spiritual Laws

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon emphasizes the need for surrender, concentration, and fascination with God to escape spiritual stagnation.

Duration: 33:28

Scripture: Isaiah 40:9, Isaiah 40:12, Matthew 6:33, John 1:1-3, John 1:14, Romans 12:1, Colossians 2:1

Topics: "Religious Rut"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the thesis that most evangelical Christians are spiritually asleep and morally stagnant. He emphasizes that this is displeasing to God and tragic for individuals. However, he also highlights that there is a way out of this state, and that God is working to help believers. The preacher urges Christians to give themselves wholly to God, surrendering their lives and concentrating on Him. He encourages them to be fascinated by Jesus and to seek the sweet fascination of loving God.

Transcript

...the twelfth chapter, Romans 12, 1 and 2. I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Now, this will be another talk in the series, How to Get Out of the Religious Rust.

There will be one more next Sunday night, and then off on to something else. But my fourfold thesis has been, and still is tonight, that most evangelical Christians, now this doesn't include the liberals, we leave them to their guts, that most Christians of our kind, the evangelical Christians, are in a rust. They are morally and spiritually asleep.

And that this is very wrong before God, and tragic for the individual, and highly displeasing to our Father which art in heaven. But that there is a way out, and that God is working in us and for us to get us out, but that he is looking for our cooperation. Now, that's my fourfold thesis, and I want to continue on it tonight.

Tonight I deal on how to get out, more specifically. And in the text it says that we are to give ourselves holy to God. I ask you, he said, I beseech you, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and

acceptable unto God.

I've heard of men who willed their bodies to science, so that after they were dead, science could have their bodies. I've always thought it was a poor shoddy gift to give anybody, giving yourself after you're dead. The scripture says that we are to give our present living bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.

And of course, if you give your body, you give everything it contains. Now, that's the thought. Give yourself holy to God.

Now, this, as I see it, this whole idea of giving myself holy to God, contains three laws. Let me mention them briefly. One I call the law of surrender.

If you do not surrender, it will be totally impossible for the Lord to do anything for you. The surgeon has to have the surrender of his patients. There's that.

I think that's so obvious, it's almost funny. That if I went to a surgeon and insisted that I were going to tell him how to do the job, and not only that, stay awake and resist him, a surgeon couldn't work like that. It's impossible.

You've got to put you where you can't resist, where you're surrendered. That's the law of surrender. But in a still more beautiful and biblical way, there is the story of the potter and the clay.

The law of surrender illustrated further. The potter has this soft yielding clay, and if the clay does not surrender, the potter can't do a thing with it. If there are burnt places, or hard places, or unsundered places in the clay, though the potter were another Wedgwood, though he were another genius, and artist at the matter of making vessels, he still could not make anything beautiful out of an unyielding blob of clay.

If a vessel is going to be two things, useful and beautiful, it's possible for a thing to be useful and not to be beautiful, say a garbage can. It's entirely possible to be beautiful and not be useful, say a lily. Now a lily has no utilitarian place in the world.

You don't say to your wife, bring us up, we're having company, bring a pound and a half of the essence of lily. A lily is just to look at and enjoy. It isn't to eat, and it isn't to be useful.

And if all the lilies in the world were suddenly ceased to be, we would just be as healthy as we are now, though we wouldn't have as much pleasure, for we like to look at them and smell them. So there's beauty and usefulness. Now it's possible to have a vessel that is useful without being beautiful.

The old cream crocks in our old spring houses on the farm in Pennsylvania, they were useful all right. You could pour the milk in them and wait for that to rise and then skim it off. But they weren't beautiful.

There's no, by no stretch of the imagination could you say that's a beautiful crock there. But it's useful. And then everybody has in his house beautiful little pieces, often Wedgwood or Royal Dalton or something, whatever you happen to like.

Now it's utterly useless. That is, it's not there to be used. It's there to be enjoyed.

It's beautiful. But God would have his vessels to be both useful and beautiful. We have some Wedgwood.

I used to come to Canada back years ago and would buy Wedgwood vessels for my wife because you could get them cheaper here. Because they came from England, I understand duty was lower. You see, I was somewhat of a, anyhow, that's what I did.

And these beautiful vessels, they're useful vessels too. They're not only beautiful to look at, but they are useful. You can make tea in them.

You can have sugar in them and cream in them. Now that's what God wants. He wants us to be both useful in his universe and beautiful in that we reflect back the beauty of the Lord our God.

But if he's going to make that kind of vessel out of us, we're going to have to yield to the law of surrender. Give yourself to God a living sacrifice and let him have you. Then there's the law of concentration.

That is, every successful person concentrates and must concentrate. Take a musician. Now, most musicians are mediocre musicians because they don't have time to concentrate.

They might have much greater ability than they're ever able to bring out because they have other things to take their time. But a musician, that is, the great musicians, have to practice and study anywhere up to five and six hours a day. They've got to give themselves to it completely and consecrate.

Take the athlete. The average fellow goes on a church picnic and plays baseball or tosses horseshoes once or twice a year. But that's not an athlete.

An athlete is somebody who lives for it all the time, plays with his team during the season, and then hunts and fishes and hustles about and makes long hikes and keeps himself in shape. He's always got to remember those arms, those hands, those biceps. They tell me that Ted Williams, the great home run hitter of the Boston Red Sox, that he had the most powerful pair of forearms and hands that you ever saw.

And he carried around in each side pocket a rubber ball. And he would walk about squeezing this rubber ball. He just got so enjoyed it, you know.

He was just taking these exercises. The result was he had great muscles here. And when he got up there, when he hit the ball, it disappeared.

Well, now he concentrated. He couldn't say, oh, give me two more helpings of pie with whipped cream on it. Come on.

And I'm going to sleep a couple of days. He couldn't do that. Got to keep those muscles in shape.

That's the law of concentration. An athlete has to concentrate on what he's doing. If he doesn't, he'll only be a mediocre, sandlot athlete.

So were the scientists. The scientists, sometimes people have thought scientists were a bit touched, a bit off, because they gave themselves wholly to it. They said about Edison that he would sleep four hours a night.

Four hours a night. I've often wondered if he didn't take some catnaps somewhere to catch up. But they said four hours a night because he was totally given over to it.

He lived for nothing else but that. That was his life. As a result, we have so many of the great things that he managed to produce.

Well, that's the law of concentration. And this musician, this athlete, this scientist may do other things, but it's this one thing to which he is totally committed. He's given over to that.

Third, there's the law of fascination. A little harder to understand, but just as real. If I had to be fascinated, it's to be held spellbound by some irresistible charm, says the dictionary.

So there's the law of fascination. If we're not fascinated by a thing, we can take it and leave it. It's like, oh, exhibitions and various exhibitions.

I can take them or leave them, you know. And a lot of other things that some people think a lot of, I'm not against them, and I'll go if somebody will take me. But I'm not fascinated by them.

That is, I'm not drawn to them by a charm that I can't break. But in the kingdom of God, there's the law of fascination, the law of the irresistible charm. And the Christian that doesn't know what it is will never be anything but a half-Christian all his life.

He'll be in the rut all his life. Now, this law of fascination out there in the world often is personal tragedy, brings tragedy. Being fascinated by an evil thing or a base thing or an unworthy thing can be a great tragedy.

The young girl who is determined she's going to be a movie star, and she starts at 13, pluck her eyebrows and paint herself up and stand in front of the tall mirror and try to look like Jane Manson. Well, now, I suppose all girls go through a phase sometime where they want to be something they'll never be. And we won't be too hard on the kids, but we'll only say this.

If they don't get over it, and if they begin to want it so bad they sell themselves for it, and if they concentrate on it to a point where, and are so fascinated by it, to a point where their parents are told off and dismissed as being old fogeys, and then they leave home, as many do, and go to the great city and try to make good, determine that they will see their name on, out in front of the theater, that can be a great curse. For men who want to be rich, the average businessman wanting to make enough money to keep his family comfortably, have a little left if anything happened to him for a rainy day, as they say, that man, that man, we understand him. The businessman who says, I'd like to make enough, as Wesley says, make all you can, in order that you can give away all you can.

I thought that was beautiful. He wanted these people to work hard and make a lot of money, and so you can use it for the Lord. Well, now, that I understand, and that's pardonable, and that is a man who is doing on the margin of his life.

But there have been men who have become so enamored of gold that they sold themselves out on the market, sold their hearts and souls in order they might be rich. And I think that one of the most pitiful creatures in the whole wide world is a gambler. The gambler who is so enamored of gambling, so utterly fascinated by it, utterly fascinated by it, they'd tell about two fellows who were washing windows.

One of them was a gambler. He loved to gamble. And they were up on a, two fellows up there somewhere on a platform, and the thing broke.

And they both started to fall 30 stories toward the sidewalk. And one of them, the gambler, yelled, I'll bet I get there ahead of you. Well, now, that's supposed to be funny.

But it's this fascination, it's this fascination, this inability to escape, this terrible charm that evil things have for people. Well, now, our Lord turns it around and says, Come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, follow me and take my cross, and take your cross and follow after me. And he says, in effect, Come to me and be fascinated by me, concentrate upon me, surrender to me, yield so completely to me that you can give all to me, and learn to be drawn by an irresistible charm to me.

Well, now, who has a right to say this, I want to ask you? Who has a right to talk like this? Who has a right? Well, those who knew him best, they've tried to tell us. And I suppose they've not even succeeded very well, even though the scriptures are inspired. I'm quite sure they don't tell us all that can be known about God.

They only tell us as much as they can tell us, because the inspired men were men, and those to whom they wrote were men, and those inspired men being men, and we to whom God wrote being men. There was imperfection and limitation in both, the inspired ones and those who read the inspired words, so that God was not able to say all he could say about himself. I'm sure the archangels that burned before the throne of God could tell us more about God than we know, even though we have an inspired Bible to tell us.

But those who knew him best tried to tell us there was Moses, and Moses said that in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, and in the beginning God made the light and said, let there be light, and there was light, and that God divided the light from the darkness and called the light day, and the darkness he called night, and the evening and the morning were the first day, so Moses took us back to the beginning of all that we see, that we call the universe, back before the stars were and before the moon was, and before space was and before time was, and says in the beginning God then began to create, so Moses says that the one that calls us to him has a right to do it, because he antedates time and he transcends space, and he fills his universe, and he is God and David. Ah that David, that sheep herder David, what a man was David, oh Lord my God wrote David thou art very great, thou art clothed with honor and majesty, who covers thyself with light as with a garment, who stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain, who layeth the beams of each chamber in the waters, who maketh the clouds his chariot, who walketh upon the wings of the wind, who maketh his angel spirits and his ministers a flaming fire, who laid the foundations of the earth that it should not be moved forever, thou coverest it with the deep as with a garment, the water stood above the mountains of thy rebuke, they fled at the voice of thy thunder, they hasted away, and then he goes back, then we go back to the hundred and third and show that this God is not only a God who makes mountains and hills and rivers and streams, and rides upon the wings of the clouds, but he loves people, bless the Lord oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities and healeth all thy diseases, and redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies, and satisfies thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, he does not always chide neither does he keep his anger forever, for as the heavens high above the earth, so great is God's mercy toward them that fear him, like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pity them that fear him.

Now that David trying to tell us, trying to impart the incommunicable and trying to tell that which can't be told of the wonder of God, and then there was Isaiah that organ voiced, sing to the Lord in Isaiah 40, it

says, O Zion that bringeth good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain. Behold, the Lord God will come with a strong hand, he shall feed his flock like a shepherd, and he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young, who have measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and kneaded out heaven with the span. Well, I could go on and read on, because they've given us these wonderful scriptures, come to the New Testament, and John Christ to tell us, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God. All things were created by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. And he became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Here is John the Mystic trying to tell us how great is God. And then over in the book of Colossians, we read there in the 2nd chapter about that Son of God. Our brother in his prayer, I think it was tonight, talked about the two natures of Jesus, the wonder of the hypostatic union, all that is God joined to all that is man, in the second person of the Trinity, world without end.

And Paul said about him, For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power. He says in the 1st chapter, Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature? For by him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things are created by him and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist, and he is the head of the body, the church.

Why am I giving you all these passages of scripture? Because I want to tell you who it is and bring before your mind again tonight who it is that is saying, I present your bodies unto me, take your cross and follow me, give yourself wholly to me, surrender to me, concentrate upon me, and learn to be fascinated by me. He is the only one that can do it. I confess to you frankly this night, my friends, that I'm a poor follower, a very poor follower.

I want no man saying of me, he's a Wesley man. I'm not a Wesley man. I'm an admirer of John Wesley and Charles, his brother, but I'm not a Wesley man.

I want no man saying he's Calvin's man. I'd never give my soul to John Calvin. I want nobody saying he's an A.B. Simpson man.

I'm nothing of the sort. I admire that missionary-minded saint, but I am not a follower of any man. It will be very difficult for me.

That's why I would never make a good Nazi or Communist or Democrat, you know, or, excuse me, I don't know any good American Democrats here. You know how I mean it. But I can't be a blind follower.

He said it. Hooray! It must be right. He's a man and maybe he's wrong.

I remember once in a board meeting years ago, Dr. L.H. Zimmer, that great saint, great Bible expositor, showed up in a board meeting in New York, and somebody said what A.B. Simpson said. Dr. Zimmer got up, grabbed the chair in front of him and said, A.B. Simpson could be wrong. I've always admired him for that.

I don't know whether Simpson was wrong or whether Zimmer was, but I can't follow men. Therefore, if anybody says to me, surrender to me and concentrate upon me and become fascinated by me, I say, now, just who do you mean? He's a man. I say, now, whether he be John Kennedy or whether he be Castro, the multitude scream the law of fascination has them held.

And they follow them and say, viva lo this and viva lo that and follow them into hell. But there is a man, my brother, that we can trust. A man who was born a woman and nursed at a mother's breast.

A man who began to grow when he was born and went up to all the stages that babies go through, cut his little teeth, and went from soft food to solid food and then staggered around on the floor while his mother was delighted to see him take his first little steps. His name was Jesus. Helped his supposed father in the carpenter's shop.

And when he grew to manhood, went up to the temple and there amazed the doctors. They shook their heads and stroked their long, silky beards and said, who could this be? And he went back and was in submission to his parents until the day he was shown in the wilderness. John was in the wilderness and revealed Jesus Christ and said, behold, the Lamb of God.

That was the man Jesus. Why is he any different from any other man? Why do I refuse to follow men and yet follow this man? Of no other man can it be said, in the beginning was the man. And he was with God and he was God and he is God.

And we beheld his glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Of no other man from Adam to this hour can it be said, his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. No other man can it be said that three days after he had gone into the grave, he rose again alive forevermore and death has no more dominion over him.

Of no other man can it be said that while they beheld, lo, a cloud received him out of their sight, and two men stood by them in white apparel, which said, Why gaze ye up into heaven aimlessly? Don't you know this same Jesus which is taken from you will so come in like manner as you have seen him go? No other man can it be said that he rode out of heaven astride a white horse, and on his thigh was the name written, The Word of God. This is the King of Glory, this man. And this is the man that says, Give yourself to me, surrender to me and concentrate upon me and be caught in the spell of the irresistible charm.

Ah, if I had the time and you had disposition to listen, I might try to tell you of all they've said about him in that Old Testament, in that New Testament, and since Bible times. I might quote snatches of the great hymns that have come down the years, these great hymns. They used him, they used him as a theme.

You know, the songwriters have a number of themes. They have country for one of their themes, and it's a legitimate theme. You sing, O Canada, and we sing, my country tis of thee, and other countries sing as the songs of their own beloved land, and that's a beautiful thing.

Then there are the songs of love. Drink to me only with thine eyes. Some pious fellow stood up and cursed that song in my hearing.

Bless his poor dumb heart. Doesn't he know the man that wrote that said, I'm not going to drink at all, just look at me and that will satisfy me? He wasn't talking about liquor. Well, apart from that, all you know is they sing about love beautifully.

Flow gently, sweet afternoon, among thy green braids. Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise. He starts out singing about a river and ends up singing about Mary, who sleeps in her white cot beside that river.

Beautiful. That's the song of love. The song of patriotism, of country, the song of love.

Then there's the terrible song of war. The awful song of war. But you know, take all the songs that man has ever written, songs of nature, songs of country, songs of love, songs of war, put them all together and their sounding brass and tinkling cymbal compared with all the hymns and anthems and songs and spiritual songs that have been written from the days, the early days of the Bible down to this hour, when they hymned Almighty God like an angel hymning at sunrise.

I could name them a great long list of hymn writers, divine men they were. I think of one that ran it like this. O God of good, the unfathomable seed, who would not give his heart to thee, who would not love thee with his might.

O Jesus, lover of mankind, who would not his whole soul and mind with all his strength to thee unite. High-throned on heaven's eternal hill, in number, weight, and measure still thou sweetly order'st all that is. And yet thou deignest to come to me and guide my steps that I with thee enthroned may reign in endless bliss.

Fountain of good, all blessing flows from thee. No want thy fulness knows, what but thyself canst thou desire? Yet self-sufficient as thou art, thou dost desire my worthless heart. This, oh, only this dost thou desire.

So wrote Johann Scheffler, the angelus, cynicius of Germany. Now, if we feel this, we don't have to be argued into it. If we don't feel it, then I don't know what to say.

Esau and Jacob, somebody wanted to know, you know, and I tried to answer the question about Esau and Jacob. Jacob was such a rascal, and yet God blessed him, and Esau such a, apparently such a good fellow, and God didn't bless him. What was the difference? Ah, one of them had, he felt the law of fascination within his heart.

He was, he needed a lot of help, and he was anything but a good man to start with. But something in his heart was leaping up, and deep was calling unto deep, and deep was responding unto deep, and the voice of the little man was responding to the voice of the great God. And that's why Jacob became Israel, after that work of grace that transformed him from his carnal state into his blessed state of spirituality.

So, if you don't have this fascination, it could be that we are but another Esau. What a tragedy to be born of the red clay, and live and die, and be buried in the red clay. When Shakespeare said of Caesar, that though he be the emperor, yet give nature time, and nature will reduce him to a bit of clay that might be used to keep the wind away.

And the great Persian poet Omar Khayyam said, when you drink, you're out of that vessel, drink reverently, it may be your grandfather's dust out of which it is made. What a tragedy, my brethren, what a tragedy to be born up out of the red clay, and live a secular, earthly life, and then die and be buried out of sight in that same red clay. But if you feel the charm and the tug and the pull of God, then you will know what the Holy Ghost meant when he said, I beseech you, brethren, Paul speaking in the Spirit, present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly unacceptable unto God which is your reasonable service.

So you feel the fascination and the pull and the tug and the charm of it. How do you get out of the rut? You get out of the rut by giving God your all, letting God have you completely, concentrating your whole life on God and his Son, Jesus Christ, and then seek to know the sweet fascination of loving God. You can't stay asleep very long when the beauty of Jesus is before your eyes.

I woke one morning in the home of my friend Cliff Erickson, a pastor in Roseland, California. You go through the desert, very unpleasant, hot, dusty, and then suddenly you burst out into one of the most beautiful valleys you ever saw, and in there is the little city. Palm trees and bougainvillea and lilies and poinsettias higher than man.

Lovely, lovely place. So he hit me and said, Now you sleep here. He put me in the guest room on the first floor.

And I slept till morning, and in the morning I was waked. What do you suppose it was? It wasn't an alarm clock. It wasn't one of those abominable radios that they sell you to wake you up to music.

It was a mockingbird. And next to the English nightingale, the mockingbird is the most beautiful singer in the world. And I came floating back to consciousness, just outside my window, mounted on a little tree, sat a plain-looking little bitty, black and white, not much to look at, but she had her beak pointed up toward God, and she was singing, oh, the beauty of that song.

I had never heard anything as beautiful before, nor sing. You know what? There are some of you that have been asleep long enough. And if you could only wake to the voice of your beloved, if you could only wake and be aroused and hear him speak, it would be sweeter than the voice of the mockingbird, sweeter than the sound of a harp, the voice of God's Son.

That would get you out of the rut, and that would get you out of your sleep, for Jesus Christ is God's music, God's poetry, God's art, God's beauty, God's all. Son of God, immortal love, whom we that have not seen thy face by faith and faith alone embrace, believing where we cannot prove, we believe tonight. We reject the claims of men, and we will follow none of them.

But we own thy claim, O man who is God. We admit the validity of thy claim. Teach us, we pray thee, to bring in our scattered lives and concentrate them upon thee as Paul did and the other Saints.

Teach us, we pray, to listen for the sound of thy musical voice until we are charmed and enthralled and enraptured by it, that we might not go our sleepy way, being mediocre, half-awake Christians, while the coming of the Lord draws nigh. Grant, we pray, that these friends may take this home and do something about it. We ask in Christ's name, amen.

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