

How to Keep From Going Stale

by A.W. Tozer

To stay spiritually vibrant, we must be mindful of the causes of staleness and take steps to prevent them, including getting proper rest, practicing candour in prayer, and introducing variety into our lives.

Scripture: Romans 12:1, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Spiritual Renewal", "Overcoming Staleness"

Description

A.W. Tozer addresses the common experience of spiritual staleness, emphasizing that it is not inevitable but can be remedied through various means. He highlights the importance of repentance when sin is present, while also acknowledging that physical fatigue and monotony can contribute to spiritual dullness. Tozer encourages believers to seek rest, introduce variety into their spiritual practices, and maintain sincerity in prayer to avoid falling into a rut. He reminds us that our spiritual lives are affected by our physical state and that God desires us to move forward rather than remain stagnant. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a balance of spiritual exercises and rest to keep our faith vibrant.

Transcript

Periods of staleness in the life are not inevitable but they are common. He is a rare Christian who has not experienced times of spiritual dullness when the relish has gone out of his heart and the enjoyment of living has diminished greatly or departed altogether.

Since there is no single cause of this condition there is no one simple remedy for it. Sometimes we are to blame, as for instance when we do a wrong act without immediately seeking forgiveness and cleansing; or when we permit worldly interests to grow up and choke the tender plants of the inner life.

When the cause is known, and particularly when it is as uncomplex as this, the remedy is the old-fashioned one of repentance. But if after careful and candid examination of the life by prayer and the Word no real evil is discovered, we gain nothing by putting the worst construction on things and lying face down in the dust. To say that we have not sinned when we have is to be false to the fact; to insist that we have sinned when we have not is to be false to ourselves. There comes a time when the most spiritual thing we can do is to accept cleansing from all sin as an accomplished fact and stop calling that unclean which God has called clean.

Sometimes our trouble is not moral but physical. As long as we are in these mortal bodies our spiritual lives will be to some degree affected by our bodies. Here we should notice that there is a difference

between our mortal bodies and the 'flesh' of Pauline theology. When Paul speaks of the flesh he refers to our fallen human nature, not to our physical bodies, which are temples of the Holy Spirit. Through the power of the Spirit there is deliverance from the propensities of the flesh, but while we live there is no relief from the weaknesses and imperfections of the body.

One often-unsuspected cause of staleness is fatigue. Shakespeare said something to the effect that no man could be a philosopher when he had a toothache, and while it is possible to be a weary saint, it is scarcely possible to be weary and feel saintly; and it is our want of feeling that we are considering here. The Christian who gets tired in the work of the Lord and stays tired without relief beyond a reasonable time will go stale. The fact that he grew weary by toiling in the Lord's vineyard will not make his weariness any less real. Our Lord knew this and occasionally took His disciples aside for a rest.

Another reason some of us become jaded is monotony. To do one thing continuously will result in boredom even if what we do is pleasant: and to think about the same things without cessation will also lead to boredom even if we are thinking about the things of the kingdom. Milton suggests that God made night to alternate with day for the purpose of providing us with 'grateful vicissitude,' a welcome change for which we should be thankful.

Some of the purest souls have written of the dangers of continuous spiritual exercises uninterrupted by lowlier considerations. Von Hugel speaks of the 'neural cost' of prayer and advises that we should sometimes break off thoughts of heavenly things and go for a walk or dig in the garden. We have all known the disappointment felt when returning to a passage of Scripture that had been so fresh and fragrant the day before only to find the sweetness gone out of it. It is the Spirit's way of urging us on to new vistas. In the wilderness God kept Israel moving. One may wonder what would have happened if they had camped in one place for forty years.

The lives of the great Christians show that they differed not only from each other but from themselves at different periods of their lives. Spiritual exercises that helped them at one stage of their development later became useless and had to be changed for others.

To stay free from religious ennui we should be careful not to get into a rut, not even into a good rut. Our Lord warned against vain repetition. There is repetition that is not vain, but oft-repeated prayers become vain when they have lost their urgency. We should examine our prayers every now and again to discover how much sincerity and spontaneity they possess. We should insist on keeping them simple, candid, fresh and original. And above all we should never seek to induce holy emotions. When we feel dry it is wise either to ignore it or to tell God about it without any sense of guilt. If we are dry because of some wrong on our part the Spirit through the Word will show us the fault.

In short, we can keep from going stale by getting proper rest, by practising complete candour in prayer, by introducing variety into our lives, by heeding God's call to move onward and by exercising quiet faith always.

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