

Miracles That Follow the Plow

by A.W. Tozer

Breaking up our fallow ground is necessary to experience the miracles of God's power and to experience spiritual growth

Duration: 41:09

Scripture: Hosea 10:12, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 13:3-9, Luke 3:3-4, Galatians 6:7-9, James 5:7-8, Revelation 22:2

Topics: "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of breaking up the fallow ground and seeking the Lord. He believes that if people take action and cultivate their spiritual lives, there will be a visitation from God that will impact others. The preacher urges the congregation to not be complacent or satisfied with a shallow spiritual life, but to strive for fruitfulness and spiritual growth. He uses the analogy of winter and spring to illustrate the transformation that can occur when people seek the Lord and allow the Holy Spirit to work in their lives.

Transcript

10th chapter, Hosea, the 10th chapter, verse 12. Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. First thing I say about it is that this text is a favorite of mine, and I have referred to it and introduced it before, but tonight I want to bring a message on it.

The second thing is that there is only one word here that has to be explained. Sowing is understood by everybody, reaping is understood by everybody, breaking up the ground is understood by everybody, and the raining upon the broken ground is understood by everybody. But there is one word here, and it's the word fallow, f-a-l-l-o-w.

I have a sense in which I plan to use this. I think it's a Biblical sense. I think it's a sense that Hosea had in mind.

But if in your part of the country, or your part of the world where you might have come from, the word fallow ground means something else other than what I make it to mean in my sermon. Don't put it down to ignorance, because I grew up between the handles of a plow, and I could hardly see over. So this and other cities, like the young fellow from the seminary I heard about, went to the farm.

He got into a little country church, and there was a whole congregation of farmers there. He wanted to show them that he was no city man, that he knew about farming, so he preached on the prodigal son. He came to the fatted calf, and he said, just in case you don't understand the importance of this, he said, Remember, that wasn't an ordinary calf, that was the one made ahead in the family for years and years and years.

So it's entirely possible when you are off of your own territory to say some things that will get you in trouble. But I just wanted to say that so you will understand that I know what I mean when I talk about fallow ground. Now, in this text, God is speaking to us from the countryside.

A great Englishman wrote a book called Natural Law in the Spiritual World, and he tried to show that the natural laws of God, or the laws of God as known in nature, extend upward and are the same in the spiritual world. That was Henry Drummond. Another man said that earth was only the shadow of heaven thrown downward and made material, that the laws of God above, thrown down into nature, became the laws of nature.

That was Emerson who said that. And I believe both of those statements. I believe that the God who made his heaven made also his earth.

Except for the blindness of sin, if we knew earth very well, we'd know heaven pretty well, because heaven and earth are the front yard and the backyard of God's palace, and God is as much at home in one as in the other. Now, God is saying here to us, he's saying, Be not proud, humble yourselves, and learn from the field and the soil and the rain. Let the earth instruct you about heaven and about life and death, and let the sod and the clay and the plow and the seed and the rain.

Let these things speak to you because I made them, and they have their place in my scheme, certainly as the silver sea and the throne have. So hear me now, says God, you who have ears to hear, hear what God will say to us, what he will say about spiritual things by means of natural things. So we present here two kinds of fields, the fallow field and the plowed field.

The fallow ground and the plowed ground. Now, the fallow ground as it is meant here, and as I understood it in earlier life, is not what agriculturalists now call it, quite. But we'll define fallow ground.

Fallow ground is fertile soil which has been tilled, and crops have been taken from it, and then one time the farmer says, We're going to let it lie a year. So he lets it lie a year, but he gets lazy and lets it lie two years, and three years, and four years, and pretty soon he gives up that field. And while it is fertile, it is not plowed, nor sown, nor cultivated, and pretty soon the green briar takes over, and the skunk cabbage, and the burdock, and the briar rose.

I didn't say briar rose before, because I always think of the briar always comes in and takes over in a field that isn't plowed. Now, this was one time a field where there were good crops, but it's big now, it's lying now, un-plowed, and because it's un-plowed, it's barren. And I want you to get a hold of this idea, for if you miss this, you've missed it all.

If it is un-plowed, it is also barren. Barren as far as the farmer's needs are concerned. Barren not of dandelions, and briars, and burdock, but barren of pumpkins, and corn, and wheat, and the rest that we need to keep us alive.

Now, there lies our field. I've seen many of them. We used to have them on our farm.

My father didn't farm all of his farm. He only farmed certain favored parts of it. And there were fields there on that farm that hadn't been plowed within my memory.

And I was there 15 years, allowing for two years that I wasn't noticing things. That would make 13 years that there hadn't been a plow in that field. Then it just went to ragweed, and wild carrots, and whatever happened to be around there.

And the sun baked it, and the rain softened it, and the sun baked it again. It got harder, and even the field mice couldn't dig into it, it was so hard. And pretty soon it was just forgotten.

A cow walked through it to get to something richer. It was an old, fallow field, an old, neglected field. But the one thing about that field that I want you to note, and that was, it didn't have the travail of the plow, and it didn't have the peril of the farmer coming early in the morning with his team, or they didn't have any of those bombable things that belt smoke there.

Now, in those days, and they didn't have in the days of Hosea, they had living things you could pat, and pet, and feed sugar, and curry, and brush, and put to bed at night. Horses, well, the old farmer comes out in the morning, and he gets the fence down, and he comes in, and he has his plow, and he hitches it up, hitches the team to the plow, and starts plowing. But for years, since this old field had had any plow down it back, not one, not a plow.

It had gotten snug by this time. Now, it knew it was fertile, and it knew that it was a Christian alright, but there it was, self-satisfied and at rest, at ease in Zion, tying a cord. It had now become a landing field for woodpeckers and blue jays and any other birds that happened to get tired on their way over.

Groundhog would come up and look around a bit, go back, knowing he was perfectly safe. There would be no plow in that field. And so it was a safe, snug, self-satisfied field, but the curse of barrenness was upon it.

It wasn't worth its salt. It produced nothing. There it lay, no wonder, no miracle of life, no harvest, no fruit, no contribution to the life of the world.

That was that foul ground. Then there is the plowed ground, and it can be that same one. Now, here comes the farmer with his plow.

It's a kind plow if you look at it down the years, but it's a very cruel plow also. And the old plowshare, which my father faithfully called plowshare until he died, the old steel plowshare would bite down into that ground, bite down in there. And the horses would lean forward and their tendons would stand out, and their blood vessels, you could see them under their finely groomed skin, while they pulled that old plow through the ground, turning it over.

And oddly, when you turned it over, it was pretty good soil, really pretty good soil. Why hadn't it been used before? Somebody neglected it, and there it lay. So the plow goes through cutting and tearing and turning over and rearranging and disturbing and bruising and causing travail and pain.

But it isn't very long then until the kind reigns of God come on that field, and the cutworms and the angleworms go to work on it, and other little creatures that God has put down there to keep it soft. And the seed that the farmers put in begins to grow, and pretty soon wonderful nature goes to work, and that field now becomes a green thing, and the miracle of life becomes. First there's the pushing up of the little green

things, and then the spreading out of those same little green sprouts into the kind of grain or whatever it was that's planted there.

And so the dormant powers are released, the dormant powers are released, and there's bursting seed and life and growth and God. Because that field that lay contented so long and snug and protected so long, now feels the bite of the cruel plow, and hears the commotion of the shouting farmer and feels the impact of the horses as they move over it. All this is necessary, but it's necessary before there can be any fruitfulness.

Now, says the Holy Ghost, sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it's time to seek the Lord till he come and reign righteousness upon you. Two kinds of lives correspond to these two kinds of grounds. There is the fallow life, and there are so many of them.

Church members and people who have had some kind of spiritual experience somewhere back down the line, and they suppose have been converted, but now they're at ease in Zion. They've decided that they didn't like the bite and the sting and the pain of the plow. They've decided it would be better to take it easy and protect themselves, and so they became proper, poised, self-contained church members, Orthodox and Evangelical in alliance.

They give to missions once a year properly a certain amount, but they don't let it bite. They pray some, but they don't let any pain follow it. They go to church pretty often, but they don't let it get hold of them and protect themselves.

They're at ease in Zion. Here we have whole churches of them. Some preachers take a church like that when they're young, and they live in that church and go all along with the congregation, preaching every Sunday to fallow ground.

The people who are religious and righteous, if not self-righteous, but contented, and they never have any worries, they're never bothered by anything spiritual. It doesn't bother them. However hot the sermon, they go home joking along the highway or along the street as they go and have their tea and go to bed.

But they haven't been bothered, and there's been no blood drawn, and they've gotten through to nothing. No plow has gone into their souls. They're the fallow ground of the church, and yet there's no fruit there, and no growth there, and no wonder there, and no glory there, and no life there.

They're not bad enough to go to hell, but they're certainly not good enough to go to heaven. And there they are, caught in between. I would that thou wert a hotter cold, because thou art neither hot or cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth.

That's the fallow ground. Then there are the plowed ones, the discontented, those who are filled with contrition. If they listen to a Sunday school teacher or a preacher or they get a hold of a book and it disturbs them, they're bothered until they get right about it.

If truth is brought to bear on their consciences, they're not restful until they get their conscience straightened out. That's the plowed kind, and contrition is a part of their very nature. Some people haven't wept over their sins for God knows how many years.

They're the fallow field, and some haven't humbled themselves under God's hand for years. They're the fallow field. But the plowed field is the field that has felt the stirring up, the plow, the confessing and the

seeking.

They are the plowed fields. That's the plowed Christian. And the difference between the two is that this latter one feels the pulsations of new life and the miracles of grace and power and fruitfulness, and it always results from a state of heart that is plowed up.

And where there's confession, and where there's contrition, and where there's spiritual discontent, contented cows, says the carnation milk company. Our milk is from contented cows. Well, it's in the nature of a cow that she should be contented.

That's why she's a cow, that she should be contented. You never heard of a discontented cow. But God didn't say, ye are my cows.

He said, break up your fallow ground. It's time to seek the Lord. You're to be a fruitful people.

Look in the big soulful eyes of a cow. John Burroughs wrote something about cattle, and he said about a cow, he said, her moist breath and her luminous eyes and her long trombone blast in the morning over the meadow. I like the sound of that.

I'd rather hear a good cow that does it right than to hear a lot of these orchestras. They call orchestras now. But here she is, and she can't do anything else.

God made her like that, so we'll excuse her and say, all right, go ahead, we like your milk. But this isn't the way Christians should live. God doesn't say anything about a Christian being a cow.

He says that we are sheep and the Lord leads us into deep and green pastures and fights our battles ahead of us and leads us out. And then he says we're soil, and says there are two kinds of soil, the fallow soil which is contented and at ease with itself, and the plowed soil which is discontented and contrite and humble and filled with confession and restitution and the seeking God. Now, religious history shows these two phases in religious life, the dynamic which is the plowed life and the advanced victorious miraculous life, and then the static which is fallow phase which has safety and caution and quietness and barrenness.

Now, look at your Bible. These two phases may be traced in the history of Israel. Israel and Egypt, there she was.

She had been there 400 years, and she had gotten adjusted to herself. She had become adjusted. She was well adjusted.

Every little boy that went to school, without any doubt, he got on his report card, he adjusts well. Everybody was adjusted to the land of Egypt. A few of them weren't, and a few of them cried, but the masses were adjusted.

And God heard the few, the relative few, that weren't adjusted, that never could get over it that they were slaves in Egypt when they should have been free men in Palestine. So God sent a man named Moses. Did you know what the plow did to Egypt? How the plow came in there, and one terrible groan after another, the lice and the frogs and the blood and the water and the blood and the darkness, and finally the death of the firstborn.

All of this came as the plow going through the land, and then when Israel was plowed up, God let her out. Then under the judges she settled down to her living. She was just living.

They were all Orthodox, they were all Jews, they were all right and fundamental and all that, but they were living far from God. Cold-hearted men, God would raise up judges, and then they'd go back into their bondage again. And then came David and Solomon, and God Almighty sent his power upon David and upon his son Solomon in the lesser measure.

But the Jews came out of this fallow phase into the dynamic phase, the plowed phase. Then before Christ came to the world, it had been 400 years since there had been a prophet in Israel. Imagine that, 400 years since Malachi, the servant and messenger of God, prophesied in Israel.

Then for 400 years there was not a prophet, for 400 years not a voice was heard from God, and so the teachers took over. They codified and systematized their theology, and the rabbis began to pull the casuistry and the sophistry trick on the law. Pretty soon they had a pile of commentary on the law called the Talmud, which was bigger ten times ten into a hundred times bigger than the law itself.

They counted their phylacteries and measured them, they counted the length of time they prayed, and they went to the synagogue regularly and they went to the temple regularly. There were good, fallow people living their untroubled lives. Nobody was bothering them, the only trouble came from the outside.

They had no internal trouble at all. One of them stood one day in the temple and said, Oh God, I'm glad I'm as good as I am, amen. I'm wonderful, God, I fast and I live right, aren't you glad, aren't you proud of me, God? That was the one Jesus talked about.

There, that's the kind of people they were. And then came Jesus Christ, then came John the Baptist first, then he began to preach, and then he baptized Jesus, and Jesus came teaching and came doing his miracles. Then the whole country went into ferment, and all the hatreds crystallized in one place and all the love crystallized in another as the plow of God went through that land.

Then came the Gospels and the Acts and the Epistles and the Singing Church and the Dying Church and the Missionary Church and the Glorious Church without spot or wrinkle. But first there had to come the plow, first there had to come the terrible preacher John, then there had to come that strange, wonderful, awesome man Jesus. And as they lived their lives and wrought their great and terrible deeds and preached their awesome and terrible sermons, it was like plowing up ground.

And then the Church began her long march down the years. But the Church settled down after a while, and then came the long, long darkness, the long darkness we call the dark ages. And then a great big German with a thick neck who wasn't afraid of anybody, including the Pope and the Devil, was climbing up the steps of a church one time on his knees, hoping that if he punished himself enough, God would forgive him.

And he heard a voice saying to him out of heaven, he probably had read it somewhere, but it was brought back vividly to his memory, that just shall live by their faith. He jumped to his knees, a converted man, and went out and began to preach the gospel. And that man was Martin Luther, and we had the Reformation.

When the plow of God went through Germany, the Reformation was born. All those long, static periods have been followed by plowing times, times of plowing. The days of John Wesley, that was, of course, after the Reformation.

The days of John Wesley, they sold their pulpits. As a young fellow wanted a pulpit, they called it a living. Practical, down-to-earth, they called it a living.

He said, Now, can you furnish me with a living? He said, You can take this church down. You're just giving a man a job. The Holy Ghost wasn't in it.

He took his living, and they paid their tithes into the church. Everybody did, and he lived. Sometimes they would be so drunk that two boys would have to hold them up, history tells us, while they preached their sermons.

They would hick and lean over in while the boys would grab them, and the Reverend Godly Most Venerable Brother was two sheets in the wind while he was preaching his sermon. There was adultery and there was drunkenness and there was gambling, and there was every kind of bacchanalian revel all through the night, and there was fighting and all the rest. Then came a man, an Oxford man, whose mother had seventeen children, and I think he, if I recall, was the fifteenth.

His name was John Wesley. He got converted, and his heart was strangely warm, and he went out and began to use the plow on England. He used that plow, and he plowed deep, and he called on them to do their plowing.

And the result was a great awakening, an awakening that joined with the Moravians to go around the world, an awakening that gave us the Salvation Army, an awakening that has given us almost all of the great missionary societies of the present day. That is, some were more recent and grew out of it, but their spiritual lineage goes back to those marvelous times of the Wesleys and the Moravians when God Almighty used the plow on men, and the men used the plow on each other and on themselves. Miracles always follow the plow, and God's power waits on the plow.

God's power waits on the plow right here in this church. The Spirit never falls on a fallow ground, but power is released when the plow comes along. If you're satisfied, you're fruitless.

If you're satisfied, you're barren. If you're satisfied, you're not growing. If you're satisfied, you're not ready for the coming of the Lord.

If you're satisfied, you're not a holy person. Any local church will play at religion for a lifetime, play for a lifetime. A pastor comes in and blesses him, and he's put a lot into his training now, and he's got a couple of degrees, and he has a family coming along now, and he has economic interests involved.

So he's careful because he has to keep his money coming in. Besides that, the baby needs shoes, and his wife and sister-in-law will cope. So he smiles and smiles and smiles and lets the board push him around, and brings his church into such an order that nobody is disturbed.

The old deacon that habitually sleeps through the sermon, he's not disturbed. And the gossipy old girl that has cursed the church for 40 years, she's not disturbed. Nobody is disturbed.

Everybody just goes the way they are, and the church goes on playing at religion. But we give our tithe, don't we? And don't we? Don't we appear at church so many times every week, don't we? And besides that, we don't gamble, do we, and race horses and play cards, and you never saw us drinking, did you? So the church plays at religion, and her entity is church entity instead of Christianity. And then, bumped awake somehow or other by somebody, by the sovereign grace of God, but maybe through some poor voice that isn't very eloquent, God rouses such a church as that.

And then they forsake the old ease and the old comfort and throw down the old protective fences and beg the plow to come in and go to work on them. So they forsake safety for the peril and the pain of living, and the miracle and the wonder of a revived church and a new life. And the lone Christian lives his protected life.

You know, we're pretty slick, we people. We're pretty slick. I read an article one time about aging.

Now, it didn't bother me personally, but I was just reading an article about it. And this fellow pointed out that an older person moves in straight lines. A child will twist in every direction and then suddenly sit down flat.

Never hurt him a bit. But an older person, instead of twisting around to do something, they turn and flip around because they're not as limber and supple as they used to be. And Christians can do that.

The older fellow, as he gets older, he protects himself. And instead of bending down supple, he does it angularly, watching his sacroiliac and all the rest. Now, churches can fall into the same state.

We can protect ourselves, learn to take it easy, and we can build cautious fences around ourselves. But we're weak and barren and cold. And then that individual Christian breaks up his fallow ground, he gets discontented.

It's so wonderful to be discontented in spiritual things. And he rouses himself, and he gets contrite, and he humbles himself, and he stirs himself up, and he concedes, and he gets right, and he straightens out. And oh, he's broken up the fallow ground, and then comes the wonderful life and joy and fruitfulness and blessing in the nearness of God, and the wonder of a blessed spiritual life that he never knew before.

But you know, it always hurts, means the plow there. Now, what does the plow mean in the private life? I'll bring it to it in five minutes, I'm done. What does this plow life mean? Well, it means bringing out into the open and getting rid of bad, private, secret habits.

The secret habit has an effect of hardening the field, that habit nobody knows about, that we keep quiet. Out into the open it comes, it's confessed, it's forsaken, and then that bad feeling against other Christians. Churches are paralyzed for a lifetime because of bad feeling against other Christians.

We have a bad feeling. They were wrong, of course, and until they apologize that bad feeling is going to remain there. But our Lord said, if you bring your offering to the altar, and there remember that thy brother has ought against thee, leave there thy sacrifice, thy gift at the altar, and go hunt up your brother, and straighten, get straightened out, and get rid of the bad feeling, and then come back and offer your sacrifice.

Five thousand dollars given to foreign missions with bad feeling in the heart doesn't affect God nor impress heaven. And a prayer twenty minutes long doesn't mean anything to God if there's bad feeling there. Let's get rid of the bad feeling, the censorious spirit that kills off the lambs and quenches the life-giving Holy Ghost.

And then there's fear, and fear always brings bondage. What kind of fear? Fear to pray in public, for instance. What a difference it would mean if some of us would be willing to begin praying in public.

From here on, every time I get an opportunity, I'm going to break out in prayer. I'm not going to pray half an hour and crowd everybody else out. It's just as discourteous to pray too long in a public meeting and prevent others who want to pray from praying, as it is to talk too much around the table and usurp the conversation.

But it isn't a question that we're praying half an hour, it's a question of our praying, letting our voice be heard. I say to you young Christians, in God's name let your voice be heard. When there's a prayer meeting, you be one to stand up and pray.

I remember the first time I prayed in public. I got up scared stiff and said, God bless the missionaries, and sat down. They're the best I did, but God knew I did it, and he knew I meant it, and so he blessed me.

And I say, fear to pray in public, fear to pray at home. There are homes that are in a state of semi-spiritual paralysis, because everybody's afraid to pray. Outside of mumbling a half-minute prayer at the table, nobody prays in public, or prays at home.

Afraid to, and then afraid to witness. Fear, a terrible thing. The bondage of fear is an awful thing.

Fear to witness, fear to witness to relatives, and witness to friends. You're a Christian, but you haven't witnessed. The man went up into the north woods of Canada from the United States.

This young convert had just been saved a short time, and he went up to cut some timber. West and north there's a great, I suppose, more timber in Canada than any other country in the world. And they cut it every year.

I don't have to tell you this, but I'm trying to get my illustration straightened out. This young fellow decided he would go up there for a winter and work. And they said to him, Now remember, you'll find those woodmen pretty tough boys, and your Christian life is going to take a beating up there.

He said, All right, I'll go. I want to go anyhow. So he went.

And he stayed out to sea and came back. And they said to him, How did you get on with the woodmen? Oh, he said, Wonderfully well. He said, No trouble at all.

He said, Those lumbermen treated me well. He said, Didn't get persecuted? Not at all. He said, You see, I never let them know I was a Christian.

You can avoid persecution if you just keep your mouth shut. And some people do that very thing because of the bondage of fear. Let's drag it out into the open.

And fear can harden the soil, and all that grows, a few green briars and wild cabbage, no fruit comes because we're afraid. Afraid to obey the commandments of Christ. Afraid.

A friend of mine was chemist for the Kool-Aid company. That is, he was head chemist for that particular plant where they make this stuff, you know, to pour water on, drink if you would like it. And he used to have their office parties, or they used to have the conventions.

And he came to me about it. And I told him, Now, I said, You can't have part in that. He said, No, I know it.

So he went to their conventions, but he hadn't understood. And when they passed around the liquid refreshments, he took Coca-Cola for lemonade. They kidded him a bit, but they found out they couldn't budge him.

They couldn't move that man. Now, how about it? Are we going to lie fallow and barren, contented, undisturbed, not bothered religiously, or are we going to listen to the voice of God and do something about our fallow lives? Can we go on without fruit, without blossoms, without barrenness? Imagine if winter stayed all the time in Canada. Imagine if your backyard was always brown and barren.

Imagine if that tree out in front of the house never blossomed. Imagine if the parks were brown and the leaves were off the naked trees all year round. No, no.

Here's what the farmers called green-up. Green-up. The time when spring comes and the birds return.

I believe that according to this text here tonight, we can have that and can bring it about ourselves. Break up your fallow ground, for it's time to seek the Lord. Spring is ready to come and you don't know it.

Break up your fallow ground, sow to yourselves in righteousness, and then you can reap in mercy later on. He will come and rain righteousness upon you. Now, that's for the individual.

Somebody says, I pray that God will revive the Church. God can't revive a company except he revives the individual that make up the company. He can't bless Avenue Road Church unless he blesses you.

So are we going to obey God in this and listen to him? And if we are, then let's do it practically. Let's stop petting that secret habit, that sin that nobody knows about. Let's stop believing that that bad feeling we have against another Christian is simply grief.

Oh, I'm so grieved with Brother so-and-so. You mean you're mad at him? And that sincerious, sorcerous spirit, and that fear, that terrible fear. Let's put the plow to it.

God didn't say, I'll break up your fallow ground. He said, you do it. You grammarians know that there is an implied subject.

You break up your fallow ground, for it's time to seek the Lord. I have confidence, I believe this will be, and I believe one after the other will find as they break up their fallow ground that there will be a visitation from God that will spill over on others. And slowly but certainly, surely, we're going to have a rich harvest in Avenue Road, and we're going to have a church that will be spiritually fruitful and green with the leaves of God that are for the healing of the nations.

Now let us offer a moment of prayer, then we're going to sing a song.

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