

The Four Seasons of Life

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer explores the four seasons of life, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and seizing spiritual opportunities at every stage.

Duration: 42:06

Scripture: Numbers 13:1-2, Numbers 13:17-33

Topics: "Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the urgency of accepting God before it's too late. He expresses his willingness to risk losing friends and facing anger in order to warn people about the consequences of not being saved. The preacher discusses the four seasons of life before God, starting with the springtime of youth and opportunity. He urges listeners not to let the summer of their desire for God slip away and encourages them to come to God while they still can. The sermon includes a reading from the book of Numbers, where Moses sends spies to explore the land of Canaan.

Transcript

Behold the voice of the tribe, the daughter of my people, because of them that dwell in a far country. Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her king in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images and with strange vanity? The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt.

I am black. Astonishment has taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why, then, is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered? The voice of the cry of the daughter of Jeremiah's people.

Behold, the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. Now, Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet. And he was heart-sick over his people, because the threat of judgment was upon them from God.

The threat of judgment. Jeremiah saw not only what was there, and heard not only what he could hear, but he heard prophetically in the Spirit. So that not only all that had happened to Israel, but all that was happening and was to happen, was grieving the heart of the man of God.

There was going to come an invasion into Israel. Alien troops were to come, and they were to enter and conquer and make captives of Israel and lead them into a far country and break up their lives and break up their nation. This they were to do.

And this was not a political accident. It was a direct result of their evil living. Jeremiah, being a man full of the Holy Ghost, was very frank with the people of Israel.

I will say this, that I have heard men preach and that I did not feel at any right to tell the people of their sins. They seemed to do it too eagerly. They seemed to do it without sufficient tenderness.

But Jeremiah said, I am hurt by the hurt of the daughter of my people. Jeremiah was a wounded man, and he was wounded not by anything that hit him directly. He was wounded as a mother might be wounded whose child lay dying in her arms.

She physically was uninjured. The child has been struck and she picks it up, and in the paroxysm of grief holds it to her heart while it expires. She is wounded by the wound of her child.

Jeremiah was hurt with the hurt of his people. So Jeremiah can speak to me, and he can be as rough on me as he needs to be. He can be as candid and frank as the circumstances require.

And I won't resent it, because a man who is wounded by my wounds and hurt by my hurt and grieved by my grief loves me. And a man who loves me can preach to me. And I won't require that he solve me or speak friendly to me or kindly to me.

I will only ask that he tell me the truth. Jeremiah knew that it was the iniquity of the people of Israel that was causing this, that was coming, the invasion, captivity, the defeat, the breakup, the deportation. He knew it, and he had named their sins.

He said there was injustice. He said there was idolatry. Jehovah had been among them.

But in their deceptive hearts they turned from the God they knew to the idols of the heathen. They were dishonest among themselves. They were liars.

They didn't hesitate to lie, even though they knew it was wrong. They were thieves, some of them were. They even committed murder.

There was various kinds of uncleanness among them. There was arrogant disobedience to the voice of God. There was stubbornness when they heard the voice of God and refusal to be corrected.

Now, Jeremiah prophetically heard a cry. And the cry was, Opportunity is past. The harvest is gone.

The summer of our opportunity is ended. And instead of our being saved, we are far out in the heathen land with our harps on the willow. Now, in the far country they chose death rather than life, the men of God said.

And they are in captivity in the far country. No sacrifice, no priest, no altar, no prayer, no protection. No anything.

In Babylon they had only bitter memories and self-accusation and fruitless regrets. And all of the great sorrow of the lost soul is in that cry, the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. Here

is the cry for help without hope.

They were experiencing, these people in the far country, they were experiencing the bitter consequences of a course of life which they might have foreseen. See, my friends, if a man knows that a bridge is out, if there is sign after sign saying, turn back, a bridge is out, if there are policemen all down the highway waving red flags and holding up their hands and shouting, the bridge is out, and a man deliberately drives on with a waxy smile on his face and plunges over to his death, he could have foreseen that because everything was there to tell him about it. You see, my friends, nobody is in hell by accident.

Nobody is in hell by accident. And nobody is in heaven by accident. There is no such thing as an accidental Christian.

There is no such thing as somebody who woke up one morning and found himself famous. There is no such thing as a man who wakes up one morning and finds that he is a Christian. We choose, we foresee, we can tell by the word of God.

We can tell two plus two makes four. So we can foresee four if we have the two and the two together. So Israel in their terrible cry, their cry of self accusation and regret, remorse, they could have foreseen this.

They are not to be excused, they could have foreseen it. And this course that they took was plainly pointed out to them, and they could have avoided it if they would. I want you to get this.

There is an ambit family, effeminate kind of Christianity nowadays, that is telling the sinning world that they are not to be blamed, that it is a disease. They say nowadays that alcoholism is a disease. The fellow who has got the delirium disease is a poor fellow who has got a disease.

The only disease that I know of in the world that you pay for with good hard money. You buy it and swallow it purposely and intentionally. But they say, don't tell the drunkard that he is guilty.

He has got a disease, a disease that he purposely and deliberately drank out of a bottle, gurgle, gurgle, gurgle, knowing what it would do to him. He could have foreseen this, I said, and they could have avoided it. The man who is in hell will have this added to the weight of his eternal grief, that he could have avoided it.

He could have been somewhere else if their love of sin had not prevented them from wanting to be somewhere else. Here is the cynical irony of a sinful life. See, we don't know how bad sin is these days.

Modern gospel doesn't say too much about sin. It makes an awful lot about a whimpering Savior who whimpers over people, and paws over them, and excuses them, and tells them, not mine, hush, hush, don't mention your sin. I died for you upon the tree, I died for you upon the tree.

And this is not the religion of the New Testament, it's not the religion of the prophets, it's not the religion of the church fathers, it's not the religion of the reformers, it's not the religion of the great missionaries, it's not the religion of the great evangelists. It is an effeminate, watered-down, perfumed kind of Christianity that parades a pathetic, bent-over, bewhiskered Christ up and down in front of people who scorn him. One man said in my hearing that we're busy all the time trying to make people eat food they don't want.

If we would tell the people, as we ought to tell the people and as you ought to know tonight, sin is your own fault, and it's my own fault if I sin. It's not an excuse that I can say, well, it was an accident or a

disease, or I got it from my grandfather Adam. I can't help myself, I'm a poor, weak man.

The cynical irony of the sinful life is that the ones who get us into our difficulties can't get us out, and the ones who stand around to help us sin can't deliver us from the consequences of sin. They prevent us from seeing the punishment. They act as a blinder on our eyes so we cannot see the executioner on the way.

We cannot see the black hole in the side of the hill that leads into the hell below. The wrong kinds of friends and lusts and earth hunger and evil pleasures stand in our way, and they lure us away. But when we get away, they can't prevent us from suffering the consequences, and they can't help us when we're there.

This is a cruel malice that smacks of the dragon himself, a heartless betrayer of the sinner's trust. Judas' carriage was cajoled and flattered and pawed over by the Jews until he had sold Christ. And when they had their hands on Christ and had ropes around him and handcuffs on him, then a broken-hearted Judas came back and offered them the money back.

And the same smiling, grinning, beard-stroking Pharisees that had begged him to sell Jesus and offered him gold or silver, those same Jews said, What is that to us? We never cared for your soul. What is that to us? Remember, young lady, what is that to me will be your answer to your sin. Remember, young man, the ones that lead you into sin can never lead you out, and the ones that lead you in when you're in will say, What do I care? That's the cynical malice of hell, and I detect in it the breath of the dragon.

Now, what's the application? That's the way it was back there. Well, this is an accurate description of a great many people today, and I suppose some that are right here now. Last Sunday night I said to Brother Gray out in this side room, there should have been fifty people, some of them singing in the choir, maybe some teaching Sunday school.

They should have been right out there on their knees if we'd obeyed God last Sunday night, for the Holy Ghost was here. This is not to reflect on the choir, no, the Sunday school teachers. It's only to say that in any company of people under fire from hell, there will be wounded men and women, and there will be those who are overcome by the flesh and the world and the devil.

This, I say, is an accurate description. Some there are who certainly know the course they're taking leads to tragedy, and certainly they have been warned and entreated, and certainly they have been willfully blind until the end that was before them. I don't want to hear that cry.

I don't want to hear it, particularly I don't want. God help me ever, God, to have to say to me, I gave you your opportunity to tell the people and you didn't tell them. You wanted to be a nice boy and you wanted to be liked by the people and you wouldn't tell them.

I don't want to hear that awful thing in that day. I'd lose every friend in Toronto rather than here. I'd have you all turn your backs and walk away in cold anger from me rather than face up to that awful moment when the cry of men is heard and women, the summer's ended, the harvest is past, and I know that I didn't do my part to try to stop that, to try to win men, to try to bring them to God.

It isn't important that you like me, but it's tremendously important that you are washed in the blood of the Lamb before it's too late. It isn't important that I be a nice fellow, but it's tremendously important that you meet God in saving encounter before the terrible day when you'll have to cry, opportunity is over. I want to speak briefly about the four seasons.

The summer has ended. Now there are four seasons of our life before God. There is the springtime, the springtime of our childhood and youth.

What a lovely and beautiful thing it is. How charming is spring. After the long winter, after the snow has covered the fields and the meadows and the yards and the highways and the woods, then the sun comes slowly up and the snow beginning to retreat.

As the poet said, the snow doth fare ill on the top of the bare hill. I always like that little expression. Snow is having a tough time keeping together.

Then that crocus that sticks its little smiling investigative face up to see whether winter is gone. The cattle shed the old coat and get a new coat. There's nothing slicker in the world than the hide of a young horse in the spring.

I've seen them dash out, lie down and just roll and roll. Somebody said, what are they doing? Don't you know what they're doing? They're getting rid of the old winter hair. Good curry comb and a brush will shine them up.

I grew up with them, pretty literally, and on them. And that's the springtime. The bird sings in the fall, you're saying to yourself, I know you, you're on your way south, you're going to Florida for the winter.

But when he sings in the springtime, you say, hello boy, I'm glad you're back. There's something fresh about the spring song, the bird. Something wonderful about the sunshine in the spring.

Far more wonderful than the sunshine in the fall when it shines through murk and haze and has a sadness about it. And it's so in the life, in our lives. You can forgive a young person anything just because they're young.

Youth, the early days, the time of freshness. The dear Swedish preacher over in Minneapolis preached a sermon on the acrostic. He said, I'm going to preach today on youth.

Y-O-U-T-H. He said, I'll take it point by point. First letter is Y. He said, that stands for joy.

Well, joy is one of the marks of youth. To be joyful. A child can be happy over absolutely nothing at all.

I think it's only fair, though, in order to be realistic, to say they can get unhappy over the least thing, too. But they can get very happy over nothing. I used to rush out when I was a lad.

I well remember it in the springtime of my life. I used to run to the edge of a hill and look down. And what I saw down there, no woman should be looking at.

I saw a lot of little boys in there all together, ready to plunge into the old swimming hole. And I remember very well that when I saw them and I knew that they were there ahead of me and we were ready to have a good time. And I would swim in that good, cool, quick run, we called it then.

Wilson Run. I would scream with delight. Literally scream with delight.

Scream with delight. And all my clothes. Talk about stripping.

By the time I got there, I was ready for a swim. Youth. Youth.

Beautiful, my brother. It's the time of opportunity. It's the time you make up your mind.

And so in the human life, there is a period, it isn't always equated with the youth of our physical selves. But there is the springtime of our opportunity, springtime of our desire when God looks good to us and the blood of Christ looks wonderful and we want to know God. And particularly if we're young in years, we don't have so many questions to answer.

We're not so cynical. We haven't been beaten down and betrayed until we've lost faith. It's wonderful to be saved when you're young.

And statistics show that most people have, that are saved, were saved when they were young. I was 17 years old when I was converted, as I've told you before. Then slowly spring gives way to summer.

We're never quite sure when spring is gone and summer has come. Summer comes finally. That is the mature life.

I tell you, a man in his twenties or his thirties, we call that the summer of his life. Surely this is his opportunity. He's got enough wisdom to know that he can't make it on his own.

Experience has taught him that he's got to have help from another world than this. And it all points to Christ, our opportunity. The sad part about it is that most people, when they reach the summertime of their lives of marriage, they have business or job obligations.

They have a car and income tax and insurance and a home and two or three children. Maybe a wife that's pushing them for a raise in their salary. Often happens that way.

Sometimes it doesn't. I would say often it doesn't, but sometimes it does. Maybe it would be a fairer way to put it.

But summer is on and the fellow is too busy. He's too busy. I know I should be saved.

I know I should be right with God. But look, I can't even be at church on Sunday. Look, the pressure is on.

I know if I become a Christian I ought to tithe and give of my tenth. But by the time the Canadian government gets 22 percent of my income and the company I work for gets this and this and this and my take-home pays pretty thin, how can I tithe it again? So they allow it to go by. How many there are, men that are beginning to show a little gray in their temples.

They're not saved. They've never given themselves to God in full surrender. They're not His.

They go to church sometimes, but they're not His. That's mature, mature life. Mature gets saved then.

Then there comes the autumn. That's the later and middle life, or later middle life. There are very few people who reach that age.

They've quit fighting it. When you reach the autumn of your life you've quit fighting it. As long as you pull out the gray hairs hoping that that will be the end of it, you're still reasonably young.

But when you quit fighting it, throw up your hands and say there's no use, that's middle life. And there are very few people that have reached that time in their lives that haven't been betrayed by their friends, disappointed by those they love. Very few that haven't had somebody to time them.

Very few. So it's a time of sadness. Unless, of course, we give ourselves over to card play and betting and drinking.

Playing around is nothing quite so pathetic as a playful old man. Nothing quite so pathetic. I'll forgive a kid anything.

They can tumble over me, knock me down. I'll get my glasses off the pavement and get back up and won't even speak unkindly to them. You can forgive children anything.

I get on buses here. And school kids pile on. And they're nice kids, all of them nice, but boy such energy.

You run all over you, you know, run all over you. Kid in a lap and push. They don't mean anything in the world.

They're just young. But when I see an old man like that, I'm ashamed for him. When I see a cackling old man whose only hold on life is ability to tell stories, an off-colored one particularly, hanging on to the shred of his manhood, which he'd like to think still is valid.

But it isn't. Weariness and discouragement in approaching winter. I wonder how many I'm talking to tonight.

As I am in the autumn of your life, and you haven't done anything for God in all these years. Sure you've tossed in a quarter. Sure you've made a missionary pledge.

Certainly. But in your deep heart there's discouragement with life, and sometimes in quiet moments you wonder if it was worthwhile being born at all. And then comes that last tragic season called winter.

And that's old age. Everything has been said about old age. I've read what the classical writers have said about old age.

And I guess if you're a David or a Samuel or an Elijah or a Paul or a Wesley at 83 or a T.J. Bach, I suppose that being old is only an inconvenience. But out of Christ it's stark tragedy. In Christ it's a ripe shock of corn waiting for the harvester.

Out of Christ it's cold tragedy. Very few people come to Christ in the snow. Very few.

I preached one time over in the state of Indiana. And a woman came down to the altar afterward and claimed to give her heart to the Lord. I have no reason to think that it wasn't an honest conversion.

And I said to her, Are you Christian? Have you been a Christian? She said, No. I said, Have you ever come to an altar of prayer before? She said, Never in my life. She was 69.

69 years old. And I don't know. I didn't follow it up because it was another town.

And I had to go back to my own city, Indianapolis, and I couldn't follow it up. But I like to think maybe God helped me that night to reach out into the snow and get a hold of a woman frozen stiff and bring her out by the warmth of the love of God in Christ and save her out of the snow. But there are not many.

Not many. Very, very few that turn to God when they are old. Those are the four seasons.

And they cry out their harvests this past. They have run through the seasons of their lives by sin. And sin has brought upon them precipitous winter.

I have met people who were young in years but had run through all four seasons already. Have you? I have seen them. They were young yet in years.

And on the calendar they still were young, but in heart the snow had fallen upon them. That's what I grieve over these times. Our youth, so beautiful to start with, gets out into the world and is soon run through.

It isn't very long before they go through all the emotional and nervous experiences. Experiences that should take a lifetime. They go through it in no time at all.

I see them walking about bedraggled, nervous, moral beatniks. Winter is upon them when they are still young. Not a gray hair in their temple, but old age in their heart.

Not a wrinkle on their face, but snow in their souls. This is a terrible thing, my brother. I don't mind telling you that I blame it, first of course on the devil and sin, but as far as its expression into human society goes, I blame it on our money-mad, money-grabbing, sin-loving entertainers.

In Canada they are fighting the influence of the United States. I don't blame them. I'm an American, and I would be ashamed to speak against my country.

But I would be ashamed to approve her filthy propaganda. I would be ashamed to approve or speak with excuse of the Sodom they call Hollywood, but that every girl on the continent is imitating. The harlots of Hollywood are imitated by our girls.

Radio and the television and the theater and the movies and the filthy literature. Filthy, vile men with maggots in their minds and serpents in their hearts sit down in a hotel room and write a filthy story. And it becomes a bestseller.

And if you condemn it, they rush out and buy it. And if the police ban it or any censor tries to prevent it from being shown, it only means a sellout in the bookstores. Such is human nature.

All this has come and the harvest is past. And our young people, young in years, flesh-faced and beautiful to look at, are burning themselves out, burning themselves out. And their highest dream of human possibility is to be a celebrity.

I'm glad John Wesley's mother wasn't a celebrity. I'm glad she didn't have poodle dogs in place of babies. And I'm glad she didn't turn the one she had over to babysitters and run the town.

She had 17 or was it 19? And John Wesley was number 17. John Wesley and Charles was back there about 14. Those two angels of God spread their wings and blessed two continents.

Susanna Wesley only wanted to be an obedient wife and a loving mother to her brood. She used to bring them in and set them down and teach them the Word. She didn't have any high opinions of what it might be to have a career.

If she had a career in place of having John Wesley, the whole world would have been poor. Not all the careers in Hollywood and New York and Toronto, not all the careers all the women on the continent have today can make up for one man, John Wesley, number 17. Number 17.

He said, we'll name him John. They didn't know what they were naming when they named him John. They didn't know what they were naming.

There goes little Johnny. Look at him, little Johnny around here. Little test, you know, all over the place, but that's Johnny.

When he grows up, they'll stop calling him Johnny and start calling him John. And he'll learn Greek when he's a kid and Hebrew. And when he hears of Ter Stegen, he'll learn German that he can translate him into English.

And he'll run the world over riding up on an old horse never heard of a jet airplane. When he arose in England, they stoned him and threw eggs on him and old fruit and dead cats and anything they didn't want, they threw at John Wesley. He went on smiling and preaching.

And when he was an old man with frost on his noble old head, he arode into the towns in England, they turned out with bands to greet him. God and he had worms. John Wesley, 17.

Nowadays we slick them up and polish them up and give them a career. You take them, I don't want them. They breed their kind and they get old before they get old and die inside before they die outside.

Long before the undertaker comes, they're dead inside. Terrible, terrible situation. Summer's ended, the harvest is over, and we're not saved.

Dear God, how terrible. How terrible. So I say now to you, watch out that you don't let slip the summer of your desire.

If you desire God, I plead, don't let it slip. The opportunity's yours, the light is on your path. Perhaps you have people praying for you, and certainly the power of God is present.

Don't let a sudden, presympatous winter settle down upon the summer of your desire. Come, come, don't let the word depart. Turn your back to the light.

Come while you can't come. This goes for those who are unsaved, know they're unsaved, out and out unsaved, this goes for half-saved people who are living in the light of other Christians and we don't know the difference. This goes for all.

May God help you tonight to seek his face. End of sermon. Sermon, Turning Back at the Border by A. W. Tozer begins here.

Turning Back at the Border, a sermon by Dr. A. W. Tozer. So tonight, I want to read a long passage of scripture. There's a good logic back to this, because if the sermon that follows turns out to be no good or mediocre, the word of God is always good.

In the thirteenth chapter of Numbers and the fourteenth, the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel. Of every tribe of their father shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them. Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain, and see the land, what it is, and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many, and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad, what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents or in strongholds, and what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood

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