

Growing or Dying No Middle Ground

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual growth and the continual work of God in our lives through the new birth, leading to a trajectory of Christ-likeness. It highlights the need to yield to God's power, climb higher in spiritual growth, and prioritize personal time in God's presence to hear His voice and experience His love. The speaker encourages a deep, personal relationship with God, focusing on eternal things and the transformative power of God's presence.

Duration: 46:00

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:16, Isaiah 40:31, Psalms 130:5, John 10:27, John 5:39, Psalms 46:10, Exodus 24:12, Matthew 11:28, 1 Thessalonians 5:16

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Personal Relationship with God"

Description

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Transcript

Well, welcome to everyone to this session. I'm Fred Tomlinson and the way I'd like to start, in fact the way I want to speak this morning is probably a little different to the usual way in certain respects, but you know there's a law in nature that is equally applicable in the spiritual realm and that is this, where there is no growing there's dying and what's more there's no middle ground, where there's no growing there's dying and you know the miracle of the new birth and indeed the new birth is a miracle of God and demands a separate session for us to re-emphasise and re-state and re-define that miraculous truth of God's grace and power, but the miracle of new birth is not a casual affair at all, it awakens your spirit to God and it infuses into your humanness the holy seed of life, the holy spirit, the holy life of God and that's a miracle, that's a miracle of grace, it's a miracle of his power and the intention that God has in accomplishing this in your life is that there will be fruit that progressively grows and becomes manifest in Christ-likeness through your mortal body and unlike in human development, spiritual growing doesn't reach a peak and then progressively deteriorate. God ordained that there be a rising trajectory if you will, you know changing the metaphor a few minutes ago earlier in this session I mentioned something to do with aircraft, well let me just think of an aircraft and of course anything I say about aircraft with a man like John Harrison in the

meeting have to be careful because of his earlier business in life, he designed them in such a way that they wouldn't fall out of the sky I think, but the fact is you know many of us have been on an aircraft as it's taking off and it's climbing with the engines roaring and then you reach a point which I must confess when I think back to the earliest days of flying I thought was actually too soon in the journey but you reach a point where obviously the degree of power is reduced and you know that you're not climbing anymore and I remember the very first flight I ever took at this particular point I had the distinct feeling that in fact the plane was losing height and that wasn't a good thing to think about, but the fact of the matter is having received the Holy Spirit of God into our human life, into our humanness as I've referred to it, his intention is that we be in a continual climbing trajectory, that we're climbing continually and he the Holy Spirit is made available with this intent to be the energizer within us.

Let me just pause there for a moment, what an amazing thing this is, this isn't just some nominal response to some words that someone's preaching, this is the very power of God in a man or a woman's life and I trust that you know something about that already in your lives as you're listening to me, so this is a work of God in every aspect, it's not of ourselves, it's entirely of him, it's a miracle of God. Now the Apostle Paul, he adds for our thoughts and consideration and indeed for our understanding a key factor and we find it in an unusual setting, or at least it might seem like that in the light of the way I've been talking, but I have my Bible open into 2nd Corinthians and in 2nd Corinthians chapter 4, the Apostle Paul has been saying in the 15th verse, all things are for your sakes that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound or return to the glory of God for which cause we faint not but though our outward man perish yet the inward man is renewed day by day for our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen for the things which are seen are temporal and the things which are not seen are eternal. I remember, and I can't help saying this at this moment as I didn't intend to from these verses, but I'm remembering many many years ago when I was young hearing a speaker in our assembly saying that sometimes it pays to read the scriptures backwards, that seemed like a very strange thing to think about, but the reason for him saying that was that he was talking about the Apostle Paul at the time and the way that sometimes it seems as though he's just ransacking his vocabulary to think of yet a better word to pile one upon the other to express the greatness of that which God is at work doing in our lives and that certainly is the case here.

If I could just point this out maybe you'll catch this idea in other places but I'm looking at the end of verse 17 if your bible is open and we have glory, just listen if you haven't got your bible open, glory, I'm backing up weight of glory, eternal weight of glory, exceeding and eternal weight of glory, more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Do you get the picture? Do you see what Paul is trying to describe? It's something superlative, it's something above and beyond anything that we could be thinking about, so this is what he's talking about here in this passage and of course the connection that I've made with my earlier remarks to this section is really what I see in verse 16 where Paul says for which cause we faint not but though our outward man is perishing yet the inward man is renewed from day to day. What he's saying here is very wonderful, I've been emphasizing the fact that this new work of God in our lives is indeed a work of God, it's his idea, it's his design, it's his power, it is a continuing work in our lives that is promised for us but the added factor that I find here in this passage is where the apostle Paul he said the outward man is perishing, the inward man is being renewed day by day, and he's talking about degrees, new degrees that is, of newness, new degrees of newness, he's saying as it were we're not merely being kept new even, that would be wonderful, but the idea here is that this newness is a developing newness, it's a newness that is moving from one level to another level, so

this growing is increasing, but notice that there's this wonderful phrase he uses here when he says in the opening part of verse 18 that all of this that he's excited about and has been describing is our experience while we look not at the things that are seen but at the things that are unseen, so I make no contribution to this great and amazing work of God's grace in my life, but having said that I'm responsible to respond to it, there must be an appropriate response to this provision that God has made and is continuing to make in my life, you know, if I could just go back to my aircraft metaphor for a moment, as an earlier stage than the one I described a moment ago, I'm now thinking that we're actually on the takeoff runway, and obviously the pilots have been given the all clear to go and the engines are just revving up, and you know, if aircraft engines rev up, I don't know how you describe them, but the turbines or whatever they are, they're just screaming and you can feel the aircraft and there's a vibration, it's rearing to go, and then comes the moment, and again I've never sat in the cockpit of a plane, I don't know which lever he presses or pause or whatever or button he presses, but somehow the brakes are released and that power now is able to start to propel the aircraft along and ultimately of course to climb into the sky on its journey, amen, you know, there are different scriptures that we can find as we read through the Bible and very particularly in the New Testament that describe what I'm talking about in different ways, but I'm picking it out of this particular little section of verses here and saying that the breaks off feature that releases God's power to fulfil its purpose in my life and to lift me on this upward trajectory, climbing higher, climbing again and climbing again from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord or the power, the energy of God, I've given permission for that to become my experience.

I'm not contributing to it in any way to make this possible, but I'm allowing God to have his way in my life. I've used the word yielding so many times and will continue to, but you know, I release myself to be caught up in the purpose of God. So that little phrase while we look is so important, while we look, everything that he's been describing is tied in with this.

It's not when God feels like or if God might be able to accomplish this, even in me, it's none of those things. This is what he's committed to do in your life, whoever you are, whatever your circumstances, whatever your background, whatever, anything about you, he's able to do it. He's committed to do it.

That's why he has your attention. That's why he's speaking to you in your heart, even as I'm talking, but he's looking for your willingness to let the brakes off completely, not half off, but to just release your life. You know that if the pilot only had these brakes half off, though, there'd be a disaster at the end of the runway.

And God is looking to do a good work in each and every one of our lives. And he's ready to do it. He has the ability to do it.

And he's saying, just give me the chance, just give me the opportunity. And that's such an important factor to keep very much in our minds. But maybe, maybe this little phrase while we look, this daily looking needs to be translated or unpacked a little bit and applied in a particular way.

And I'd like to do that for a few minutes with you. I think that this looking that Paul is referring to here, it presupposes many things that we could talk about and go in different directions with this idea within the context of scripture. But without even beginning to try and make a list of what some of those alternatives would be, here in this passage of scripture, the central thought is while we look at eternal things, that's what he's talking about.

And to look at eternal things, the way God intends us to look at eternal things demands that we stop looking at temporal things. And this is the problem, this is the problem why so many don't get the brakes off, because they're so tied to the temporal things, the temporal ideas, the things of one's own person even, let alone circumstances, in so many ways hold us back and we're distracted. And we may say more about that as we go on.

But this is the idea that's very much before us at this point. It's while we look at the unseen spiritual things. You know, let me just state one thing one more time, and that is that God has made the provision and God has given us the promise.

And so it's as though we want to say, but Lord, could you just explain to me in a fresh way what it is that is in your heart to accomplish? You know, we've got this catalogue of things that Paul refers to in the passage, having read them, studied them, contemplated them, sought to embrace them, there's, I think there'll always be a question in our hearts that still lingers on, we want to understand more perfectly. One of the songs I learned in Sunday school was, it had this line in Help me to understand it, help me to take it in. And then that song went on to say what it meant for thee, the Holy One, to take away my sin.

Help me to understand it, Lord. What is it, Lord, today that you are wanting to put your finger on or throw light on, spotlight for me, or for us, as we're gathered here this morning? You know, there's a wonderful section of Scripture, I only want a verse, but I should tell you where I'm reading from, where I'm thinking. I'm in the book of Exodus in the Old Testament and God has been talking to Moses, you needn't turn there, it's just one verse I'm going to turn your attention to here.

But God is speaking to Moses, God has descended upon the mount, he's there, he wants to say some things, some very important things to Moses. But just listen to this one statement, I'm looking in chapter 24 and it's verse 12, and the Lord said to Moses, now listen carefully, he said, come up to me into the mount and be there, and I will give thee tables of stone and a law and commandments which I have written, which thou mayest teach them. It's just this, we're saying, Lord, what is it you want to do in my life, what is it you want to accomplish in our lives here, by this divine energy working in us? And I think it's summed up right here, we've got all the other statements, they're all valid, they're all important concerning what God wants to do in us and through us, but it seems to me that this is the very core of it all, to hear God saying to Moses, Moses, I want you to come up into the mount, I want you to come to me.

And then there's those three little words, and be there, just be there, what an incredible thought this is for the almighty, the divine God, and he's longing for you to take the brakes off and allow him to bring you to this place, this place of union, this place of ultimate fellowship, in his holy presence, and he says, and just be there. You know, perhaps I'm reaching for my Bible again here, because I've got my New Testament in front of me, but you know, listen to these words, I won't tell you where I'm reading from, because I think you'll recognise as it gets started here, this is something in the Old Testament, it's a unique book in the Old Testament, and I'll give you a big clue, and this should answer the question, it's a story of romance, and it depicts for us, or pictures for us in a very real way, the heavenly bridegroom, winning and drawing his bride, and I believe the Holy Spirit is using this word even now this morning to answer our question, what is it Lord that you want to do in my life in a new way? For lo the winter is past, and the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of the birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land, the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell, arise my love, my fair one, and come away, O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stirs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is

thy voice, and thy countenance is beautiful. How about that? Does it get any better than this? This is how God is looking at you, my dear friend this morning, whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever your story is, let me tell you, you are loved of God, and he longs to bring you into that place of intimacy, into that place of purest love, and in these wonderful words, they're filled with tenderness.

I wrote to someone this morning and made reference to his many mercies that will never end, but what a mercy is this, that the holy God of heaven is speaking to me, speaking to you today, and he's saying in my words, I love you, and I want to just hear you speaking to me, I want to hear your voice, I want to see your face, it's God saying to men and women who were all vile, lost, dead sinners, and his arms are wide open to you, and he's seeking by his spirit and through his love to draw you to the place where you understand what he is intent upon accomplishing in you, and he brings you to that point where you say, I give in, that's when the light comes on that was referred to earlier in this meeting, it's when the penny drops, as I've been saying, and we realise this is what God wants, this is not some nominal Christianity as it may be thought of in general in these days, this is God, this is God loving with a love divine, all loves excelling, and his arms are outstretched to you individually, and he wants to draw you into this special, wonderful place where you experience his holy presence, he's calling you just as this bridegroom in this story speaking to my heart of the very spirit of God, bringing the house of Christ to me, it's come away my beloved, come away, it's time, the season's right, it's the moment I've chosen, he's chosen this moment to say these things to you today, and he's saying the time is right, this is the moment, come away, come away with me, come away to me, I love you, isn't that wonderful, it's a call away from everything else into his holy presence. Now, let me take the rest of the time I have here and look at it perhaps in a little more pragmatic way today, you know, because we all live in this crazy, busy world, and every one of us, whatever our circumstances, in one way or another, we're inundated with endless demands and distractions, this is the story of our lives, many of the demands are legitimate and pressing to us, however, there's one undeviating fact we must keep in mind, and it is this, that you will never get to know the Lord unless you discover this principle of withdrawing into his presence, there's no alternative, there's no substitute, and there's no exception. I read the words of the 46th Psalm, be still and know that I am God, be still and know that I am God, as I'm saying all the rest of the things I'm going to say, remember this, while we look not at the things which are seen for their temporal, but while we look at the things which are unseen, they're the eternal things, you know, an old Quaker once said and taught that it takes much time to learn to be quiet, the Psalmist said it's when I'm quiet, that's when I have the possibility of knowing that he is God, in that personal way, you know, in his presence, and in his presence, what do you do? I'll tell you what you do, you listen, you listen, I read in the last book of the Old Testament, who shall stand when he appears? A. W. Tozer, he said this, he said in his presence, silence best becomes us, and it was Spurgeon who once said, there are times when solitude is better than society, and silence is wiser than speech, then he went on to say, we should be better Christians if we were more alone, waiting upon God.

I think one of the dangers that we face, perhaps in life in general, but we're thinking far more specifically of when we are bowed and we find ourselves in God's presence, the danger is that we just talk too much, there's a word that's not, was used quite a lot in my early days, sometimes at me actually, I won't go into that, but it's the word chatterbox, so much of us, we're like chatterboxes, and we think, well, praying, well what praying is all about is coming with our grocery list, and when we look down the grocery list and look at it, it's either about me or it's about other people, but you know, there's a place for that, but we're looking for a priority here in this session, I believe that in his presence, in our prayer in his presence, little is more, you know, it's this waiting, waiting in his presence, there's that wonderful passage we could turn to, you know it well I'm sure, in Isaiah chapter 40 in verse 31, the prophet speaks about this place of waiting, as

we wait before him, it's the place to be, it's the posture to adopt, that brings the renewal that he describes in that verse, where we mount up with wings as eagles and so forth, and so on, and the psalmist really understood this concept of waiting very very well, I was interested to discover that he uses the word waiter, waiting 21 times through his psalms, and if you want a particular one to look at, we can't do it now for time's sake, but it would be Psalm 130 verses 5 and 6, and there's a line in another old hymn that we sing sometimes, in the old English it goes, and earth has ne'er so dear a spot as where I meet with thee, amen, when God spoke to Moses and he called Moses to climb up and come to him in the mount, into his holy presence, he said to Moses, come alone, and you know the word alone means alone, I think I'm sure you have similar stories, but I can think back over my years, and there are certain events of Christian fellowship that stand out vividly, they were rich times, I'd love to talk about them right now, but they were rich and very special times of fellowship with other men and women who truly and genuinely loved the Lord Jesus, but what we're focusing on again is the priority position, but we never lose sight on it, this is while we look at the eternal things, there's a sense in which it's so important to come alone, I have a very wonderful wife, she's somewhere in one of those pictures I'm looking at on the screen right now, and we've been married an awful long time, not an awful long time, a wonderful long time, let me correct that, I'll be in trouble for that one, but you know in the final analysis, and I've said this many times over the years, in the final moment I will stand before God all on my own, and my Sheila won't be there, and your spouse or whoever you may be thinking about right now, it's just you, I have to have dealings with God all on my own, it may be great to sit together and pray, it may be great and is great to sit together with our spouses and our family to read the scriptures and so on, but there must be those times when you withdraw alone into the presence of God, come alone Moses, I want you on your own, I've got something to say to you exclusively, something to accomplish in your life that is just for you from me, this is how we must think about these things, I think failure even in this one area causes many of us to shoot ourselves in the foot if you'll excuse the expression, because we want to do it our way, well this is okay, this is better, this is fellowship, there's a time for fellowshiping with the brethren, but there's a time to withdraw and get alone for God, and those times must become the pattern of your life if you really truly want to know God, everyone's program is different, everyone's life is different, but there must be, there must be, and I'm encouraging you with this, this is the pragmatic aspect if you like, but there must be a conscious deliberate plan that is just vital for each of us if we're going to, if this that I'm trying to describe to you stumblingly is to become your experience, then we must plan for it, it must become so regular in our lives and in our days, and we're all different, and I could talk about that for a last few years in a very new way in my life, those very early morning hours before the day gets started have been so prime, so primary in my experience, and I think so primary in my ministry as well, and I encourage you with that. Now having said that, waiting in God's presence alone, bathing ourselves in his presence, allowing him to minister and speak to us, now no doubt there will be a time and a moment on these occasions when we'll open the scriptures before us in his presence, and we'll turn again to his great letter, one great brother of yesteryear referred to as God's love letter to us. You know I was raised, as some of you have heard me say before, in a world of Christian teaching that was far narrower than that of most of you who are listening to me on this occasion, I was raised in the Plymouth Brethren, that's a time in history when there was no such thing for us as a television set, there were certainly no computers, there was no such thing as Christian music DVDs or anything similar to that, these things never existed.

We were isolated in our own assembly, in a little group of assemblies, and that's where I met Sheila, that's where everything was started in my life, in the things of God, and I'm very grateful to God for that as a beginning. But today things are so different, aren't they? I mean we've got YouTube here, and Christian people are presented with just a smorgasbord of teachers and of doctrinal flavours, but much of those

flavours tend to produce, I submit to you, a very superficial sort of get-a-brain evangelicals, I do believe that. The fact of the matter is it's easier to listen to another message about an Antichrist than to withdraw into his holy word and into his holy presence for yourself and discover God personally.

We're not throwing the baby out with the bath water, what we're saying is there's a priority that must become a central core value of your life if you are serious about wanting to know God. Perhaps there's even a need to put aside our devotionals and just open our Bibles with this prayer, with this whisper in our hearts, O send thy spirit, Lord, now unto me, that he may touch my eyes and make me see. Show me the truth concealed within thy word and in thy book revealed.

I see the Lord. Or perhaps you pray in those moments or whisper a prayer. Speak, Lord, in the stillness while I wait on thee.

Hushed my heart to listen in expectancy. Speak, O blessed Master, in this hallowed hour, let me hear thy voice, Lord. Let me feel thy touch of power.

You know, a little bit of advice, if you can receive it from me. I guess I'm old enough for that. I've got enough great-grandchildren to make my point.

You know, when you listen to men's voices, listen discerningly, listen carefully. What are you listening for? Listen for the voice of the shepherd. Be very, very discerning.

You know, I can't describe to you in any detail what I'm thinking about. It's that certain sound that really, I can't define it. But by God's grace, I know it.

I know it when I hear it. And I believe that you will know it when you hear it. But we need to attune our inward ear to hear him speaking.

This certain sound can't be learned in a Bible seminary. I mean, I never went to one anyway, and anyone listening to me can tell that a mile off, I'm sure. But God had a different way for me.

But you can't learn God in any other way than by individually responding to his drawing and letting your brakes fully off and allowing his power to take you where only he can take a man or a woman. It's in the spontaneousness of his presence, where having practiced this sort of withdrawing from everything else, where I'm alone with him, that he is able to accomplish something in my heart. We tend to come with our brains to God.

You know, we approach him on that level. We want more information. We need information.

The Bible gives us information. The gospel is a gospel that has words. It has information.

We're to teach it. How shall they know unless they hear it from a preacher, Paul said on one occasion. But the fact is the gospel is far, far, far more than words.

The words of scripture, and Jesus taught me this, they're there to show me what the truth is and to bring me into the truth and to bring me to himself. Jesus said, you search the scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life and you won't come to me, he said, that you might have life. This is getting your priorities right.

And it's so very critically important for each and every one of us. It may be that the majority of professing Christians today, I'm not throwing out an accusation, I deliberately prefix my words in this way, it may be that the majority of professing Christians out there today know little or nothing in their experience of these things that we're thinking about this morning. So many think that they're managing, but without these things that we've focused on, these eternal things, these invisible things that we've been at least touching this morning, without them becoming the pattern of our lives, we are not managing.

We're not managing. We're talking about something that is critically important. As I close, can I ask you where you are, my dear friend, in all these things? Remember how I started out, where there's no growing, there's dying, and there's no middle ground.

In our modern evangelicalism, we have invented, or I don't want to include myself in it, but it has been invented, and that is a third category where you can be a carnal Christian. But the Bible doesn't hold out that for us. We're either in or we're out.

We're in the kingdom of light or we're in the kingdom of darkness. We're in the kingdom of the Son of God or we're still in the kingdom of the very enemy himself. Let's see things clearly, crisply, and no matter how it upsets us.

I'm thinking of a preacher, I know John Harrison knows who I'm talking about, who would make outrageous statements and then he would say, getting himself off the hook, so to speak, he would say, well, I didn't write the Bible. Don't blame me. I didn't write the Bible.

This is the way of God. There's no alternative to it. And I encourage you with all my heart to seek that highest way and give yourself to God and allow him to allow you to experience that lift off and to be carried away ever deeper into the things of God.

Amen. Let me just pray and then I have just one or two things to say when I have. Father, we thank you for what you have had described as the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

And we thank you together, Father, that you in your grace has allowed us to come under the sound of the message, under this certain sound, Lord, the sound of the shepherd speaking into our hearts. Lord, we pray that we shall be those who not only recognize your voice, but who then follow you with us, whoever you lead us. Lord, take us each and everyone more deeply into the divine intent of your gracious and loving heart.

Lord, help us to embrace you, Lord, as we sense your embrace of us, even in these moments. Bless every person listening and take us forward in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Can I just say this for those on the internet? Please do take a look at my new YouTube channel, I feel so strange even saying that, but I'm saying it, which is entitled, or labelled, Turn to the Scriptures with Fred Tomlinson. You can follow a link there and go to the Mackenzie Christian Fellowship website and there you'll find a little bit more about me, apart from anything else.

And what else? You can request my contact via that site as well, if you want it or need it. But let me just say this, if you're finding blessing here in these messages, do press that subscribe button and leave a comment. We so enjoy the comments and we're so blessed and thankful to God when we read what so many people are saying.

Amen. And I hope you'll look for me next week. God bless you.

Bye-bye.

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