

Out of the rut into revival!

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Preacher: John Winter

[0 : 00] Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.

In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat, for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him.

Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Amen. The Lord will bless to us the reading of his word. And I hope this will open, but if it doesn't, I will manage. Sorry about this. No idea why it's doing this.

Never mind. Ah, here we are. Good. Okay.

[1 : 09] Alright, so, there's a verse. And there's a background to this verse, which has to do with Wednesday. So on Wednesday I was meant to be in York, and I was meant to be meeting a pastor from York, going to a prayer meeting, then meeting the pastor, and I had to leave after dropping Eve off at half past seven.

So, at about quarter to seven that morning, I got a text from the pastor saying, sorry, I have to go to Manchester. I'm going to have to let you down.

I'll give you a ring later. So my day was changed. I was then thinking, do I go? Do I not go? I want to go to the prayer meeting, but I want to make the most efficient use of the day.

Okay, so I got in touch with the guy I was meeting first of all, and said, look, I'll come in a few weeks' time. So I dropped Eve off and then was ready to come down here. So I came down here, got here at 25 to 8 in the morning, and thought, what am I going to do now?

I hadn't planned for this. It was a different day. And so I stood here, and I started to pray, Lord, what do you want me to do with my day?

[2 : 24] And sometimes, you know, when you're very conscious of the Lord speaking, and we shouldn't be necessarily surprised at this, should we, I felt the Lord say to me, go in the room over there behind Jackie and get a book and read it.

And I thought, okay, there's a lot of books in there, but I'll go in. So I went, and on top of the stand, there was a pile of books, and I said, well, Lord, here's a pile of books.

And I picked it off, and I seen immediately the one I should read by A.W. Tozer called Out of the Rut into Revival. Now, I don't know if you've ever read A.W. Tozer.

He's quite a read. He's a 19, well, mid-20th century, 1920s, 30s, through to the 1960s or something. And he was a deep south preacher, and he called a spade a spade. So you could expect some really tough words from A.W. Tozer. And this is the one, what he started with, and it really grabbed my attention.

[3 : 32] Next slide, please. The treacherous enemy facing the church of Jesus Christ today is the dictatorship of the routine. When the routine becomes Lord in the life of the church, programs are organized, and the prevailing conditions are accepted as normal.

Anyone could predict next Sunday's service and what will happen. This seems to be the most deadly threat in the church today. When we come to a place where everything can be predicted and nobody expects anything unusual from God, we are in a rut.

The routine dictates, and we can tell not only what will happen next Sunday, but what will occur next month. And if things do not improve, what will take place next year?

Then we have reached the place where what has been determines what is, and what is determines what will be. Now, I planned my day.

I was telling the Lord what I was going to do, and then the Lord changed the plan. As the next slide will show, in his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.

[4 : 46] I was a bit lost. Lord, what am I going to do? I had my day planned. And then God brought to my attention a book that was saying, that's your problem. You're doing all the planning.

And then asking God to bless your plans. Why not ask God to give you your plans and ask him to bless them? And so that morning, I read the book, and I finished it at one o'clock.

So I read it all, and I received such a blessing from reading it. I did have a break, and I went up to the graveyard, up the 199 steps, and had a look around the graves.

Very interesting. I discovered that there was a woman in there who lived until she was 109. In the 18th century, I thought, that's amazing. Anyway, I just thought I'd tell you that, but that just is amazing.

Out of the rut into revival, dealing with spiritual stagnation. Well, that was a challenge to me.

[5 : 54] What kind of rut am I in? And in the book, next slide, please. In the book, just ignore that one, sorry. I'll come back to that, but the next one, please, Josh.

If it'll come up. Ah. Ah. This happens sometimes. That was a black slide with white writing on, but you've seen a blank screen, so I'll just tell you what it basically is saying.

In the book, Tozer says, there are dangers. First of all, the danger of rote. You know what rote is? Repetition. Rote is repetition without feeling.

It's like when you learn your times tables. One times one is... One times one is one. One times two is two. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. You learn them by rote.

Yeah. Yeah, you know it. It's a long time since I've done that. But you know by rote. You learn it by rote. And when you watch children do this, they can do it amazingly well, and it becomes rhythmic, and you can do it.

[6 : 52] You can learn Scripture in the same way. You can learn it by rote. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. I know that psalm really well. But as one person once said when it was recited, it's as well to know the psalm, but do you know the shepherd?

And then there is not only rote, but there's rut. Bondage to the rote. When we are unable to see and sense bondage to the rote, we are in a rut.

Now, we get in rote. It's very easy, don't we? Repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat. Do the same old thing. Feel the same old feelings. Get the same old outcomes, and we just feel, wow, I need to get out of this rut.

Yeah, it's just become all too mechanical. It's a terrible thing when our worship becomes a rut, when our service to God becomes just a repetition and a routine without feeling.

And don't you think that sometimes you just need to get out of the rut? You know, this danger of, well, we turn up at church, expect the same thing, which is really a way of saying we don't expect anything different.

[7 : 59] Well, we follow a God who surprises us and does amazing things. A measure of him always this morning, was it Sunday, than anything we can ask or imagine.

If we really believed that, we wouldn't be in a rut. Because who knows what God might do next. And then there is, of course, the danger of rot. When the psychology, the non-expectation takes over, and spiritual rigidity sets in, which is an inability to visualize anything better, a lack of desire for improvement.

Now, remember, in Revelation, Jesus writes to seven churches, and he tells them that they're in a rut, a need to change. Like the Laodicean church, who said, we are rich and increased in goods and of need of nothing.

We're absolutely fine. Thank you very much. Except Jesus said, actually, you don't realize you're miserable and wretched and naked and blind. Your own perspective on how you are spiritually is not the truth.

You need really to examine your heart. You need to repent of your lukewarmness, and you need to recover your first love. Examine your heart, repent of your lukewarmness, and recover your first love.

[9 : 20] Get out of the rut and into revival. Back to that previous slide, Josh, please. If I can read it, yes. Somebody once said, says Toz, I love this, somebody once said that man is made of dust, and dust tends to settle.

Have you noticed that in your house? It settles. Some of you don't let dust settle, I know. People tend to settle down and do the same things year in and year out, slowly getting around in a circle.

When this gets into religion, it is deadly and evil. The majority of Christians are asleep and in a spiritual rut. When we follow Christ, there must be persistence.
We must go on. And I guess that's the message God gave me on Wednesday morning. in a very powerful but in a very gentle way. You're stuck in a rut, John.
You need to stop asking me to bless your plans and you need to ask me for your plans. Out of the rut, into revival.
[10 : 29] Amen.