

Following Jesus

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Summary

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the transformative power of answering God's call, highlighting the redemption from sin and the importance of personal response. He encourages listeners to leave their old selves behind and attach themselves to Jesus, emphasizing the significance of identifying with Jesus for true fulfillment and satisfaction. Mr. Tozer also contrasts the fleeting nature of life with the eternal nature of God, encouraging prioritization of time and resources on things that will last, such as sharing in God's eternity and immortality through faith in Jesus Christ.

Message

I want to talk a minute or two. We've had a good full day with outgoing missionaries and singing and baptismal service and some preaching from the Psalms. And tonight, I want to talk a little about following Jesus, which seemed to be the normal thing in a service like this. And in the fourth chapter of Matthew, Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee saw two brethren, Simon called Peter and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea for they were fishers. And He said unto them, follow Me and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed Him. And going on from thence He saw other two brethren, James, the son of Zebedee and John, his brother, in a ship, with Zebedee, their father, mending their nets, and He called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father and followed Him.

Our Lord Jesus here, called them and they followed Him. And here He began to do what He had never ceased to do, He began to call men to come after Him; to save them by changing their direction. And I want to explain here, I regret that sometimes it's necessary to put in a footnote because somebody has spoiled a lovely truth for you. And when I say that Jesus saves men by changing their direction, if it were not for liberals and modernists, and cults generally, I could go on to something else. But I have to stop here and put in a footnote and explain what I mean, because we hear these days a great many people talking about redirecting their lives. They take a man no matter how bad the man may be, or how perfectly putrid in his heart, and they do what they call redirecting. He goes to a psychiatrist or to a counselor, and they redirect him.

Well, I don't mean that because a redirected sinner is just a sinner traveling in another direction. He's still a sinner. An unredeemed son of Adam that hasn't been renewed by the Holy Ghost, though you redirect him, he's still traveling in another way. The boy in the death cell waiting to die, may pace from east to west in his cell, and then somebody come in, redirect him and having him pace from north to south. But he's still in the cell, and he's still going to die for his crimes. So,

behind all this that I'm giving you tonight, is blood atonement, the necessity that a life be redeemed before it can be redirected. That is what is overlooked by a great many people in our day.

Now, the truth is, that if first there's an objective fact, and then there's a subjective response. The objective fact is that we have redemption in His blood. That's the objective fact. And we have that redemption in His blood, whether we do anything about it or not. We still have that redemption in His blood. Christ Jesus died, the just for the unjust, and He who was rich became poor for our sakes. And the Son of Man came to seek and save that which was lost. And He said, it is finished, on the cross of Calvary. All that's true whether we make any response or not; it is an objective fact.

We might walk into a dining hall and there, all placed and ready to go, would be a feast fit for a king. And yet we could stand and look at it and go away starving, making no response. For the second thing is the subjective response. The objective, that outside of you, and the subjective is that inside of you. And the objective fact is, we have redemption in His blood, prepared for us. The subjective response must be, that I, in faith, go and avail myself of that which He provided for me. I hear a Voice and turn and trust and follow, and thus, that which is objective becomes subjective. That which is external becomes internal. That which is true on the outside, now becomes true on the inside.

But Christianity is not a subjective religion of imagination. Neither is it an objective religion of things done on the outside. It is both. It is change within as a result of something God has done outside. God, on the cross of Calvary gave His Son to die, and He died that we might be redeemed sinners, or sinners redeemed. And then we follow and respond subjectively and personally to the call of Christ and the work is done inside. Then we say, tis done the great transactions done. I am my Lord's, and He is mine.

I want you to notice what kind of people there were. I remember once hearing Dr. Mason, who will preach here next Sunday, give a great message. You know, Dr. Mason doesn't always preach equally. That is, sometimes he can be as ordinary as I am. Again, he'll rise to magnificent heights. And I heard him rise once to one of those magnificent sermons, an epochal sermon, when he talked about the kind of people that followed Christ. This is not his sermon, incidentally. But at least he did; he went over, and I have only about eight or nine kind of people that followed Jesus.

But he took a whole sermon to show from the Gospels and The Acts that a cross section of all humanity followed Jesus. Well, they do and did and are still following Him. There were Peter and Andrew who were fishermen. There was Levi who was a publican and Luke who was a physician and Paul, who was a scholar and the woman at the well, who was a fallen woman and Lydia, who was a businesswoman before her time, and Sergius Paulus, who was a statesman, and the servants

of Caesar's household, who were servants in the royal palace. Then there were the old and the young and the rich and the poor.

And then there was that group, which the Bible calls the common people, the people that Lincoln said, God must love, because He made so many of them, common people. I don't have any aspiration to be anything else but a common person. I don't want to be known as anything but a common person. Well, the common people follow Jesus gladly. Now, He calls us. He calls you and me. And He called them and immediately they followed Him.

Now, what does He call us to? I'll only mention two things, because I have a full-length sermon on what the Lord calls us to, but I'll talk to you tonight about two things which I don't particularly develop in the sermon on the call of Christ and what He calls us to. But I'm thinking of two things here tonight. He calls us to the good and away from the bad. I wish that we'd get a hold of that. I really do. He calls us to the good, away from the bad, two simple words, I think they're both Anglo Saxon words, I haven't bothered to look it up, but I think both those words would be Anglo Saxon, good and bad. We've invented such long sesquipedalian terms now. And people don't believe much anymore in goodness and badness.

My mother, God bless her memory, was a dear little pagan lady who had high morals. She wasn't converted until she was an older lady, and then was converted, thank God, and went to heaven. But as a young woman who wasn't converted, she had high moral ideals. Not only sex morals, but all morals having to do with lying and stealing and all the rest. Her morals were very high. And she used the words good and bad. And there were only two kinds of people to my mother, good and bad. There were good people and bad people. And I think, after all, she was more Scriptural than she knew, and more Scriptural than some of us evangelicals will admit that she was. The Lord talks about the good and He talks about the evil.

Now, God calls us to the good, away from the bad. You know, we like to think that there's a kind of trick by which we can get converted and be what we still are or still be what we were. But the Bible calls us away from the bad to the good. And I'll say this for you, we Christians get a lot of lambasting and a lot of criticism; and we have some of it coming without any doubt. There are a lot of weaknesses and inconsistencies among us.

But no man was ever the worst for following Jesus. I want you to write that down in your memory forever. That nobody was ever the worse for following Jesus. No honest man in his right mind ever rose in a public assembly and said I want to testify that once I was an honest man, but I heard the call of Jesus Christ and I left all to follow Him and now I'm the thief. I was once a man who held truth in high honor, but I followed Jesus Christ. And now I'm a confirmed liar.

I once was a man who held myself in good control and now, I'm a drunkard and a libertine. There never was a man who would rise and say, once, I was a good, honest husband and a good father, but I followed Jesus Christ and now I beat my wife and kick my children around and drink up my pay. Nobody ever talked like that in his right mind. Nobody ever came and stood up in a meeting and said once I was a humble, meek man, and I follow Jesus, and now I'm an arrogant, proud fellow, proud as the devil. Nobody ever said that.

He calls us from the bad to the good. And when He said follow me, He called them away from the bad to the good, away from the old life to a new life. No matter where you are, how much you know, or where you've been, or how cultured you are, you always improve when you meet Jesus Christ. Keep that in mind. He always improves you. Jesus Christ improves a man always. It depends upon how bad the man is, how far God has to break him down and tear him down. If the building is too old to use, he has to be torn clear down, shoveled off and hauled away.

But if a man is living a reasonably moral life and he becomes converted, then God shifts the grounds of his morality from himself to the blood of Christ and from his own ego to the cross on which Jesus died. And his righteousness then ceases to be his own and becomes the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. But the external life of the man won't have to be so changed.

I am sure that some of these who were baptized tonight, and who thus in public declares that they're going to from now on follow Christ before the world. I am sure that the same thing wouldn't happen and didn't happen to them, the same that what happened to Mel Trotter or John Newton or Billy Sunday. Or some of those who were worldlings, and some of them not Billy Sunday, but some of them were immoral and low and evil to the point of being unspeakably so. And the Lord had to change them around completely and upset their whole life. But a person who was honest and who loves truth and who is obedient, if he's a child at home and is moral and decent, there won't be such a radical external change, but there'll be just as real an internal change, just as real an internal change.

The man is traveling 20 miles an hour in the wrong direction, and he suddenly stops and turns around. It'll be a change. But if he's traveling 125 miles an hour in the wrong direction, and makes a sudden, screaming, skimming, spark flying stop and turns around, everybody will write a tract about that. They would say boy wasn't that something. He was going 125 miles an hour in the wrong direction, and he suddenly turned around and started the other way around. It was something to see. So, we write books about that. But the man who was only doing 20 miles an hour and turned around was just as certainly converted as the other man.

So, Jesus called men from the bad life to the good life. And while nobody can say, I came to Jesus as I was, pure and clean and true and honest, and I trusted in Him and now I'm impure and unclean, and dishonest. Nobody can say that, but there are hundreds of thousands who could rise today and

say, once I was a liar, but God made my mouth clean by a touch of fire. Once I was a wife beater, but today I live in peace with my family. Once my children hated to see me come home, but now they run down the walk to meet me. Once they wouldn't trust me at my work, but now everybody knows I'm an honest man. Once I had debts all over that I didn't try to pay, but now, I've either paid them or I'm paying on them. Once I was an unclean man, now by the grace of God, I live the kind of life a man should live.

Thousands and hundreds of thousands can say that, but not one lone man can say Jesus Christ called me from good to bad. He called me for my high to low. He called me down from high moral heights into the gutter, never. Never, never, never, Jesus does not act like that. He calls us from the bad and calls us over to the good.

Then I point out also that He calls us to the permanent away from the transient. I don't know whether it's temperament with me, but this bothers me more than almost anything else in religion, the impermanence of everything. Every earthly thing is changing. And Henry Francis Lyte said, change and decay and all around I see, the changes in people. You see a fellow and see him 20 years later, and he comes up to you and looks you straight in the eyes and says you haven't changed a bit. God bless his honest heart. He meant to tell the truth, but he lied. We have changed, and you know we've changed. And he was trying to ease the shock. But then on the other hand, you looked at him and what did you see? You saw change there too. That boy's countenance was gone. That round red face that used to grin at you, has begun to be lean and scaly now or at least dry. the old time is working on him. Change and decay in all around I see.

Some of you people that have been born in other countries. You'd like to go back home. My advice is, don't do it. You will be disappointed too much to death. I left my home in Pennsylvania when I was 15 years old, and it was 20 years before I went back. I never saw it for 20 years. But oh, man, was I disappointed when I went back. The children that I grew up with were all gone, married and gone, and the old folks were all dead and the middle aged were all old. And the trees that stood around in front of the house were all down, and even the hill that I thought was a big hill, it looked as if it is shrunk. It probably hadn't, but it looked to me as if it had shrunk. And the distances that I thought were interminable had just become little jumps for an automobile. So, my advice is, don't go back home because you'll just come away miserable. Change and decay in all around I see. And there'll be change everywhere. And that's one of the hardest things I know is change, always change.

One of my boys came home yesterday and brought home a Saturday Evening Post, 47 years old, I think. 1909, what would that be? My mathematics is just awful. 1909, how long ago is 1909. All right. I'm never sure. I know how old I am. But that's about all I do know. But there was magazine over 45 years old, and brethren, it's not only comical, but it's sad. It's just sad. Fairy soap and keen cutter razors, Colt revolvers and great big blouses for ladies with huge billowing sleeves. And the

hair, great billows of hair up here. And the senator, Senator this and Senator that, and Roosevelt President, I think if I remember. That is, the first Roosevelt, president. And now they're all gone.

And I flipped over the magazine, and I read about Senator so and so said and I said, dear God, where's this Senator? He's dead and gone. And the senators now that we're hearing on the air and seeing them in articles in the magazines, give them 47 years and where will they be? They will be gone too. Everything has change and decay at the heart of it. And a man can be in the headlines today and forgotten tomorrow. And that's one of the saddest things that I know in life.

You can't get anything permanent. Nothing is permanent. Diamonds they say are permanent. But the wearers aren't. That diamond you're wearing now that you proudly say to yourself, that thing that shines bright 1000 years from now. Yeah, but who will have it on? And who had it on before you got it? You say, my husband, my boyfriend bought that for me? Yes. But then, he didn't make it. God made that millions of years ago. And they dug that out and it's been floating around now a long, long time; cut and re-cut and chipped and chopped and chiseled and polished. And it abides, but the people that wear it don't abide.

He calls us to the permanent. If there's anything, if God were to say to me, son, I like to have you tell me, what are the two things you're most pleased with that I've done for you? I'd say Father, two things I'm most pleased with is, that you took sin away and enabled me to have fellowship with Thee. And the second one is that you let me do something that will last. Let me have a part in something that won't perish, that time can't gnaw it away and the rust of the centuries can't rust it away. There it is, permanent.

Moody had as his life text, he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. There you have it. In the will of God, we abide forever. Jesus Christ says, come on, follow me. And we come and follow Him and He lets us share in His eternity and have a part of His immortality. Pray a prayer that changes something while the ages roll. Give \$100 to the Lord's work and somebody gets it and uses it in God's work, and he changes the face of the world, somewhere in some mission field or in some Bible school or evangelistic meeting or prayer group. Just a little money, but God has allowed us to take that dirty thing the smells of tobacco and sanctify it and give it permanence. Lay up your treasures above where thieves don't break through and steal, the way Jesus said.

Well, the moment a man touches Christ, that sense of impermanence, that sense of floating goes out of it. And you know that you've got hold of eternity and immortality and the absolute. You're no longer dealing with fragments. The world is dealing with fragments. Everybody's found a little piece like a monkey in a China store after a windstorm. And there, every monkey finds himself a little piece, and he chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, he says and runs with his pretty little shiny piece. Every little monkey has a piece.

And out there in the world they have it. This is the businessman, and this is the actor and this is the writer and this is the poet and this is the artist and this is the laboring man and this is the truck driver and this is the airplane pilot and this is the housewife, and each of us has a little piece. And we run, chat, chat, chat, and it shines and we say we've got it. No, we've got a broken fragment of it out of a China shop after the windstorm we call the fall of man. And each of us has his little piece. And we are little philosophies.

Everybody has his own little philosophy. Plato has his, Aristotle his, and the cynic his and the stoic his and John Dewey his and Bertrand Russell his. We each have our little hunk of the China that's been a smashed vase that we've picked off the floor and dug out of the debris. And we write books about it and give it a name and make disciples to our little chunk of pottery. And we think we got the whole world in our grasp and all we've got is one little piece that fits into the world.

But Jesus Christ is the all-encompassing One. He was before the world was. He will be when the worlds have burnt themselves out. He's underneath all and above all and around all in all. He's above, but not pushed up and beneath, but not pressed down and outside, but not excluded and inside, but not confined. He's above, presiding and beneath, upholding and outside, embracing and inside filling. I've quoted that before from some French archbishop. He certainly said it and Jesus Christ is all that. And He's all that to you and me. And when I come and touch Jesus and I'm touched with the finger of Jesus, something flows into me that's immortal and eternal and absolute. And I'm done dealing with fragments; not little pieces anymore.

I heard a rabbi on the air the other night give a marvelous talk, a Jewish rabbi, a marvelous talk. He quoted the New Testament like a New Testament preacher. Later on, he was interviewed, and they said to him, Rabbi, what's the difference between religion and philosophy? Well, he said, philosophy is a bigger term. They always disappoint you somewhere down the line unless they know God. This philosophy, a bigger term than religion. Why, by religion, you mean faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ embraces all the philosophies that there are in the world, all science, all learning, all art, all beauty, all everything, are gathered up in the spacious bosom of Jesus Christ. Nothing is bigger than Jesus Christ, nothing is bigger than religion, if by religion, you mean faith in Christ.

So, to follow Jesus, those first disciples left the old life. Now notice it, they left the old life. They attached themselves to Jesus Christ. They joined His band of followers. They began to listen to His words and then they started obeying His teachings and they call themselves by His name.

Now, it's no different today. We hear the same call today. For He began to do then what He has never ceased to do, and say, follow Me. And today we hear the same Voice. And when we hear the Voice and whoever hears it, follow me, we leave the old life, and we begin the new life. And we attach ourselves to Jesus Christ, and then we identify ourselves with Him. I am proud to be

identified with Jesus. Ralph Rader used to sing, I'm satisfied with Jesus Christ, but often I wonder, is Jesus satisfied with me? I am proud to be identified with Him. I hope he's not ashamed to be identified with me, seeing that His blood and His grace and His Spirit and His forgiving mercy has worked on my heart.

I have heard of foreign people coming to the United States and working like absolute dogs, both men and women, both the husband and wife, and rearing a family. And that family grew up in the luxuries of America, luxuries provided by the hard, rough, permanently dirty hands that never do quite come clean, of the working man, the working woman.

And they went to school and went through college, learned perfect, flawless, idiomatic American English. And when they got old enough to notice that Dad said "vy" when he meant why, "wineger" when he meant vinegar, and "dat" when he meant that, and that they weren't cultured. I have heard how these children got ashamed of them and wouldn't invite their young folks home. They wouldn't invite their friends home because smiling old mama would come out looking like a bit of middle Europe. Speaking poor wretched English, a hairdo that just isn't hip.

And these rascally, ungrateful, young scoundrels, steered their boy and girlfriends away and wouldn't bring them home. Shame, shame, shame, Judas Iscariot. But another time I heard this that happened, and father died but the mother still lived. She was apologetic and smiling and always using terrible English. If you understood it, all right, but never matched and never tracked. Never a verb ever followed a noun or whichever way it's supposed to. And she reared a boy. And that boy finally was graduated from, I think, from medical school to summa cum laude, which is a Latin way of saying he was really on top. And he won some sort of a citation.

And they asked him to stand and receive it and he stood to receive it, and his little all half scared to death, timid mother, a little blob of motherhood, done in a dress that just wasn't in style, was sitting there two or three rows back, and he stood, and the mother came waddling out. And he turned before all the hundreds, and pinned the citation on her old blouse, and said, if I amount to anything, here's the reason. And if I have any brains, here's where I got them. And if I got through school, these hands put me through. See them. She deserves it, not I, and they applauded to the echo and wept with a sheer delight of seeing something good in a bad world. He wasn't ashamed of an old lady who talked poor English and had rough hands.

O Sacred Head, now wounded by sin and grief bowed down. So scornfully surrounded with thorns thine only crown; O Sacred Head, what glory, what bliss till now is dying. Though despised and gory I joy to call thee mine. He doesn't stand very well, the real Jesus, the Jesus of the cross. He doesn't stand very well. The Jesus of the Christmas cards and the Easter cards, he stands all right. Everybody's ready to say a nice thing about that Jesus. But the true Christ of the cross doesn't stand very high with people. They don't want to be bothered with it. They don't want Him to

dictate their lives. They don't like to think that you got to die before you can live. And He's going to change your whole life. But He condemns you before He can convert you. That He slays you before He can raise you from the dead. They don't want to know that. So, our Lord Jesus doesn't stand very high in public esteem. But I feel it so keenly, I wish I could do it over again.

I was brought up in a family where nobody was converted at that time. I became converted; joined myself to Jesus Christ. Joined the church and was baptized, began to go to church and I was the only Christian in that whole large family that was. And I stood there and was happy to do it. It was not always easy. I admit it was not always easy. And sometimes I slurred things over a little bit, maybe as a young fellow and wasn't quite as bold as I might have been, but they knew where I stood.

And Father was converted, mother was converted, two sisters converted, brother-in-law converted. And a new dynasty began, a new reign began in the kingdom of God among the Tozers. And there are now Christians scattered all around. Not all of them as good as I want them to be, either uncles, aunts, and cousins and nephews and nieces and all the rest. We've got them from Japan to San Diego. But every trace of Christianity that I can find my, two brothers and three sisters, my own, and relatives, every one of them dates back to my conversion, all over the country.

I had a fellow write to me the other day and signed himself Gilbert Tozer. He said, I'm about a third or fourth cousin, five or six times removed. I want you to know that I am converted. And he said, now, I want to throw my house open to you whenever you come into my neighborhood. You come and see me. Well, I haven't seen him.

You know what you can do, man. You can change not only your own life by the grace of God, but you can change a whole section and block of your family. You can turn not only one, but you can turn companies and regiments of men and women in the right direction. If you follow Christ and leave the old life and begin the new and identify yourself in Jesus, you can join His people. Don't be ashamed of His people.

Sometimes, I get cross, I hope it's in a nice, sanctified way, but I wouldn't always guarantee it. But I get a bit disturbed because God's people do such dumb things and seem to be so lacking in a lot of things that I'd like to see them have and have myself. But I'd rather belong to the church of God than any group of people in all the wide world. If I were to be made a 33rd or 39th degree Mason the day after tomorrow, I would turn my back and scorn it and walk to the cross and say, lead on O King Eternal, the day of march is coming. Pick the way of the cross and the thorns and the misunderstandings and the raised eyebrows and the lonesomeness and loneliness. Take it. Take it. Identify yourself with these people. Go along with His people.

Sure, we've got hypocrites. Sure, we've got people that we think are all right, but don't live it. Sure, we've got young people that attend our young people's society and sneak off to a dirty movie Friday night or Saturday night. Sure, we have. I don't know who they are, now, I'm guessing. But I think we have. Sure, always it's that way. Sure, we have people that we think are great praying saints and if you knew them at home, you'd be shocked. Sure, we have. I suppose. I don't know which ones, thank God. If I knew which ones, I'd go straight to them. But I never don't know. God didn't tell me because He knew what I would do.

So, He keeps it from me. I don't know who they are, but I'm sure no fellowship ever existed; Jesus had his Judas and Paul had his Dimas and Peter had his Ananias and Sapphira. How can you and I have anything less than a few people that aren't what they should be?

Nevertheless, I'm not leaving the children of God. If they'll have me, I'll have them. Lincoln said he was never going to get married because anybody who would have had him, he wouldn't have. And that's one way of looking at it. But any group that would put up with me, I would feel as if I didn't want to put up with them. But we can't let logic dictate. We're going to have to say Lord Jesus, I joined Thy people. I identify myself, and then let the world know. Let the world know you're a Christian. Don't make a goose of yourself and go around with big buttons, big enough to stop a handcar, saying Jesus only. Don't do that. Don't carry a Bible so big it takes you and your wife to lug it down the sidewalk. Do you think that's witnessing? No, don't do that.

Don't think you've got to sing, nearer my God to thee and give you a witness, as we say. Don't make a fool of yourself under any circumstance. Live your life and where ever opportunity offers, slip a word in for your Savior, in a nice way when you can do it. And above all things, live the Christian life. Live it, live it, live it, brethren, live it. And when you live it, they'll see it. A candle doesn't have to shout, everybody, eyes front and center, look this way. Everybody sees a candle once you light it. If you're a lighted candle, the world will know, and they will look in your direction.

Some of them will be pensive and homesick and go home and cry and wish they could be like you. And some of them will hate you and some of them will scorn you and cut you to pieces. But some of them after thinking it over for a few weeks or a few months or a few years, will surrender and say, I've fought this long enough. This man's life proves to me Jesus Christ is real. So, I'm going to come and follow Him and identify myself with these people and join myself to Him; call myself by His name. Believe on Him and trust Him to save me from the bad and make me good and save me from the transient and give me that which is permanent. Save me from this world and give me a home above.