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Churches get in ruts only because individuals get in ruts. It is impossible that the church should do anything that individuals do not do. It is impossible that we should make any progress except as made by individuals. It is impossible there should be any regress unless individual Christians go backward. Think about people who find themselves in religious ruts. They discover a number of things about themselves. They will find that they are getting older but not getting any holier. Time is their enemy, not their friend. The time they trusted and looked to is betraying them, for they often said to themselves, "The passing of time will help me. I know some good old saints, so as I get older I'll get holier and better. Time will help me, purify me and revive me." They said that the year before last, but they were not helped any last year. Time betrayed them. They were not any better last year than they had

been the year before. Nevertheless, last year they said, "Next year surely I'll make some progress. I'll get out of this rut. I'll go forward with God." That would have been this year, but this year they are not any further along than they were last year or the year before. This year they might be saying, "Well, time is my friend. Time will help me. I'm getting older, and next year I will make progress." I say to you that the people in the religious rut are getting older, but they are not getting any holier. Time, which they have trusted to be their friend, is betraying them and proving to be their enemy. Time is doing something else to them: it is increasing their indifference to spiritual things. The signal that God used to be able to get through to them easily is now getting fainter and fading away. Once in a while on good days they can still hear it. You know how it is when you travel away from a city like

Toronto. You have your radio on to get the news or just to listen to music. You want to listen to it, but as you move away the station gets fainter. The signal is still reasonably clear, but it is fainter. And then you get into a pocket where you do not hear it at all. You say to yourself, "Well, the station is fading out." Then suddenly it comes on again. Well," you might say, "we're hearing it again." But it is still very faint. When you get far enough away from the city you do not hear it at all.

### ***Dull religious feelings...***

That is exactly what people in ruts find out about themselves. They discover that the passing of time tends to dull their religious feelings, and the signal that used to be quite clear is fading out. Then they worry a little and say, "The signal is gone. I'll have to do something." Suddenly it comes on again and they hear it a little

*Continued....*

and say, "Oh, it's not so bad after all." They are just in a favorable pocket – perhaps some new preacher has come to town. They think they are hearing the voice again, and they are, a little bit. But it is not long until they are out of range and cannot hear it anymore. Time has increased their indifference to spiritual things and dulled their religious feelings, continually making them harder to change.

Change is one of the ingredients of Christianity. If people could not change, the gospel would be absolutely meaningless. If the Lord would say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; repent and believe," and a person could not repent or believe, the gospel would be meaningless. The fact that people can change is the only hope they have. If they could not change, there would be no reason to preach to them that they must change. And yet we are sent to preach that people should change, meaning they should repent. They should turn from darkness to light. They should turn from idols to God. They should change. This is absolutely necessary, a vital ingredient in the spiritual life.

People who are in the rut, the circular grave, find that it is getting harder for them to change. They used to have spells when they were emotionally moved. Their wills got over on the side of God, and they really meant to make themselves into good Christians by the grace of God. But those times are getting fewer. They cannot afford to wait and say, "Oh, well, I will do it next Thanksgiving. I'll do it when I come home from vacation." No, they will either do it now or they will not do it at all.

There comes a time when they must make a change. If they do not make it, they never will. Time is stealing away their days of opportunity to make it. They began with a given number of days, and they have already used up so many days. But the tragedy is that they do not know how many remain. They do not know how many they have left because they do not know how many they had to start with. While they could count the number of days they have been on the earth, they do not know how that stacks up to the number accorded them, so they do not know where they are. They only know that the days are doing what the poet said about the leaves. "The leaves of life keep falling one by one."

A beautiful sugar maple stands in front of our house up on Old Orchard Grove. It is one of the greenest trees I have ever seen. It hangs on to its leaves a long time, and then sometime in October I notice some leaves are missing and say to myself, "Oh well, there is still a mass of leaves. I do not need to worry." The next day I notice there are not as many leaves, and then I begin to notice some branches beginning to show. Before the snow flies there is not a leaf left. People in the rut never know when the last leaves are falling for them.

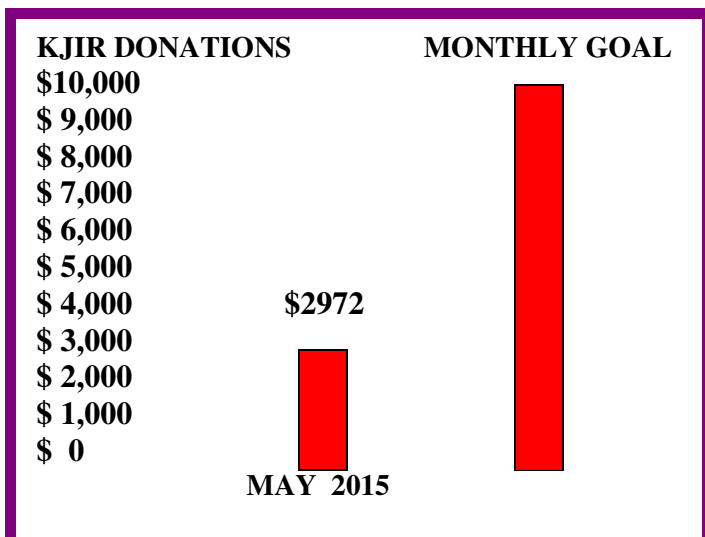
**A.W. TOZER**  
**RUT, ROT or RE VIVAL**

**K**

**J**

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**Words from the wise...** The supreme challenge for the church's faithfulness to her ministry, her vocation, is whether its conditions bare true witness that it has not been overcome by spiritual death. We must make an individual application here also, because what we are saying applies to us individually as well as collectively. It's not possible for all of us to have the advantage of a collective fellowship of God's people. Some of us have to live in places where we are very much alone. Nevertheless this word is for us. The Lord has ordained that His people, whether they are able to gather together with all the advantages of so doing, or whether they be scattered and isolated shall have in them the power of life to transcend the power of death. This is the will of God. If that is what is revealed as the Lord's will, and then let us first admit to the possibility of its realization. Then, having accepted the fact that it is possible let us who are the church stand for it, here and now.

**B.H. Clendennen**