

Warning Signs of Drifting Away

Hebrews 2:1 & 3:12-15

Intro

Please read with me Hebrews 2:1, “*We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.*”

One summer a family decided to go on a holiday at the beach. While they were there, they rented a small boat for recreational use on the beach. One day the wife jumped in the boat and launched out into the water to just lie back and soak in some sunshine. After what seemed like a short span of time, she opened her eyes and realized that she was several hundred meters away from the shore. In a panic, she screamed for help.

Only one person on the shore seemed to hear her call, and that was her husband. When he realized her predicament, he immediately attempted to swim out to rescue her. That did not turn out well, because he was soon in need of being rescued as well!

Fortunately the lifeguard was doing his job that day, and he was successful in rescuing the husband and the wife. By the time he was able to get to the wife in the raft, they were about a kilometer from the shore.

As I reflected on this story it made me think about how believers often drift away from the Lord spiritually. It really doesn't take much time at all to drift so far from the shore spiritually that one can scarcely even see land anymore.

Through the years I have been pastoring, I have noted several key things that tend to cause Christians to drift away from God. Here are some of them:

1) Being Too Busy

Ephesians 5:16, “*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*”

One of Satan's greatest weapons against us seems to be his ability to make good people busier than ever before. We often sacrifice the best things in life by spending time doing things that are just “pretty good.”

If you desire to walk in close fellowship with God, you will need to take a close look at your schedule. It is likely that you are doing too much. Perhaps your overly hectic schedule is affecting your relationship with God. I encourage you to cut out any activities you can that will allow you to focus more time on your relationship with your Creator.

Christ said for us to “*seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness*” (Matt. 6:33). Prioritize your time in placing God first and foremost in your daily Schedule.

It's easy in life to get caught up in matters that seem very important at the time, but in the light of eternity they will shrink into oblivion. Because we all have only so many hours in our day, our focus on these seemingly important matters also means that we neglect matters that are huge in light of eternity. When these things nag at our consciences, as they often do, we justify our priorities by saying, “Someday I will attend to these eternally important matters, but right now, I'm too busy.” But such procrastination can be spiritually harmful!

2) Misplaced Love

1 John 2:15, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*”

Be careful not to set your heart on things that really don't matter. I cannot tell you how many times I have seen good people lured away from church life because they have fallen in love with things or activities that have no eternal merit. For example, sports can certainly be a thrilling activity but if those sports activities begin to adversely affect the spiritual involvement and development of your life and family then cut back on some of those activities and prioritize your relationship with God.

3) Discouragement

During the past few decades that I have served as a pastor, I have often watched Satan using his weapon of discouragement to drag people away from spiritual activities.

When the trials of life cause a person to become discouraged, he or she often begins focusing on those problems and takes their eyes off of Christ. It reminds me of when Peter walked on the water. He did great until he took his eyes off of Jesus and began looking at the waves beneath him and fear took over him.

It is important for you to know that when life's storms grow dark and your trials become intense, that is the time to run to Christ and not away from Him.

4) Parasitic Sin

Hebrews 12:1, *"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."*

Many people begin to drift away from God, because they have sins in their lives that cause them to feel guilt when they show up at church. And they feel reluctant to pray or read their Bible when they know they have these issues in their lives.

Many people have sins in their lives that are damaging them just like parasites in one's body. And those sins will certainly affect your spiritual life and weaken your faith.

The solution here is not to drift away from God. The key is to confess your sin to God who will restore you and make you whole again. God encourages us through Scripture to open our hearts and confess our sin. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

5) Doubt and Confusion

Doubt and confusion has been the enemy's tactic since the beginning when he tempted Adam and Eve. We live in a world where the claims of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith are going to be more and more attacked. A great deception is going to culminate on earth. Even Christians who are weak in their faith will be easily led astray.

Jesus predicted it. In Matthew 24:10-13 Jesus said, *"At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."*

Jesus also said, *"However when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"* (Luke 18:8).

In the end times there will be a great apostasy – that means people turning away from true faith. Paul exhorts us to *"guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith"* (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

Slow Paralysis

What should concern us more than anything is that drifting away from God numbs our sense of danger. At the beginning when we are conscious that we're drifting from God and that our spiritual senses are becoming duller, there's always a false hope in our minds that a little energy and effort on our part can at any time turn the whole situation around. We underestimate the paralyzing effect of drifting away.

One winter a bird was seen on a piece of wood floating down the river towards Niagara Falls. It was enjoying the movement of the swift gliding stream. It had no sense of danger. Why should it be afraid? The bird had wings. Couldn't it just fly off when the point of danger was reached? So it thought, as it rested free from care on the piece of wood which carried it down near the edge of the falls.

When the bird reached the point of danger it tried to fly and soar, but it could not. The river's mist had frozen upon its wings, and so it miserably perished as it plunged over. Isn't there a serious danger that our habits fix us so immovably to the drift of our circumstances that we cannot free ourselves, even when we want to?

How have you been doing in your journey with God over the past year or the past few months? Have you drifted or are you drifting? Now is the time to return. Call out to God before you are so far from the shore that you lose all sense of spiritual direction.

There is a warning in Isaiah 55:6-7, *“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”*

Conclusion

When you have extended periods of prayerlessness, no Bible reading, returning to old sins, and living the Christian life by yourself, please take these symptoms seriously that you are drifting away from God.

Remember the Prodigal Son? His father was watching the horizon and waiting for his son to return (repent), and then he spotted him a long way off and ran out to greet, kiss, and embrace him. That's the Father's desire for you if you have drifted away.

Jesus said *“Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man”* (Luke 21:36).

Becoming a Christian is very much like getting married and in fact the Bible uses this analogy. First of all it is a commitment to a person, Jesus Christ, (not just to doctrines) and it requires all that a marriage relationship requires, especially a constant loving communication. Our faith weakens when that communication breaks down for whatever reason, so it is imperative that we spend time with the Lord, listening to Him and speaking with Him.

Return to your first love.