

# Backsliding

The Tale of the Frog in the Kettle

[Wikipedia](#) says "The **boiling frog** is a fable describing a frog being slowly [boiled alive](#). The premise is that if a frog is put suddenly into boiling water, it will jump out, but if the frog is put in tepid water which is then brought to a boil slowly, it will not perceive the danger and will be cooked to death. The story is often used as a [metaphor](#) for the inability or unwillingness of people to react to or be aware of sinister threats that arise gradually rather than suddenly. While some 19th-century experiments suggested that the underlying premise is true if the heating is sufficiently gradual,<sup>[1][2]</sup> according to contemporary biologists the premise is false: a frog that is gradually heated will jump out.<sup>[3][4]</sup> (ED: PERHAPS THERE IS A LESSON HERE - GENUINE BELIEVERS WILL EVENTUALLY JUMP OUT! A THOUGHT TO PONDER.) Indeed, [thermoregulation](#) by changing location is a fundamentally necessary survival strategy for frogs and other [ectotherms](#)."

**Webster** says that to **backslide** means to lapse morally, to fall off; to turn gradually from one's faith and practice of the truth of the Gospel. To backslide means to drift into sinful habits from a prior state of Spirit enabled holiness.

The peril of the **drifting life**...

For most of us the threat of life is not so much that we should plunge into disaster, but that we should drift into sin. There are few people who deliberately and in a moment turn their backs on God; there are many who day by day drift farther and farther away from him. There are not many who in one moment of time commit some disastrous sin; there are many who almost imperceptibly involve themselves in some situation and suddenly awake to find that they have ruined life for themselves and broken someone else's heart. We must continually be on the alert against the peril of the drifting life (cf 1Pe 1:13, Heb 2:1, Mt 26:41, etc). The Word will never drift from us. The danger is our drifting from the anchor provided by the Truth of God's Word. The harbor of salvation is absolutely secure. It is Jesus Christ, Who never moves, never changes, and is always available to anyone who wants the protection and security of His righteousness. (From [William Barclay's commentary on Hebrews](#) - however see [critique of Barclay](#) or [here for some of his beliefs](#))

**Charles Naylor** (1941) speaks about those saints who are **drifting** - "They have become used to being unspiritual. They are not just altogether satisfied with it, but they would rather be as they are, than to make an effort to be more spiritual. So they drift along. Oh, of course, they would like to be more spiritual like their brethren, but they have become used to being as they now are, and as they are doing pretty well, why bother about things? To be sure, they have lost their former zeal, but they have got used to being without it. They used to feel very keenly when they omitted spiritual duties, but now they have become used to omitting them and it does not bother them so much. We can get into a place where it is just natural for us to love righteousness and to hate iniquity, to desire to do all we can for God and not hold back from effort. We can get used to service and sacrifice, and this we must do if we are to prosper in our souls as God designs that we should prosper. But woe unto us, if we sacrifice those qualities of righteousness in the soul, and get used to sin." ([Read the entire article if you are drifting or beginning to drift - They Got Used to It!](#))

Screwtape advises Wormwood on how to attack

All the healthy and out-going activities which we want him to avoid can be inhibited and nothing given in return, so that at least he may say, as one of my own patients said on his arrival down here, 'I now see that I spent most of my life in doing neither what I ought nor what I liked.'

The Christians describe the Enemy as one 'without whom Nothing is strong'. And Nothing is very strong: strong enough to steal away a man's best years not in sweet sins but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why, in the gratification of curiosities so feeble that the man is only half aware of them, in drumming of fingers and kicking of heels, in whistling tunes that he does not like, or in the long, dim labyrinth of reveries that have not even lust or ambition to give them a relish, but which, once chance association has started them, the creature is too weak and fuddled to shake off.

You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy.

It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts (The Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis)

**Backsliding** is one of those terms like "Trinity", a term which is not found in Scripture but which is found in truth all through the Bible. Backsliding is similar in that it occurs only rarely in English translations (NIV - 6x, NAS - 2x, ESV-4x - Pr 14:14, Isa 57:17, Jer 8:5, 14:7, Ezek 37:23). Note that some Bible versions use the term **apostasy** interchangeably with **backsliding**, there are some reference resources that propose that apostasy and backsliding describe different events. They say that **apostasy** is a permanent condition and **backsliding** is a temporary lapse (duration not specified).

**Joel Beeke** asks "**What is backsliding?**" Backsliding is a season in the life of a professing Christian when his sin grows stronger and his obedience declines. Not all sin is backsliding. The Christian life is a constant cycle of sin and repentance, all under the atoning blood of Jesus. But at times the cycle of repentance is broken for a while. This is backsliding. It could lead to outright apostasy or falling away from Christ, thus showing that the person is not saved. But by God's grace not all backsliding is deadly to the soul. Our Physician can heal fallen runners. Healing begins with diagnosis. The most dangerous injury is one where you do not recognize how serious it is. Many Christians are like people who know something is wrong with their bodies but refuse to go to the doctor until a friend forces them to—or until it gets so bad they have no other choice. Sadly, avoiding diagnosis can be deadly. The infection turns into gangrene. The cancer metastasizes and spreads. Early diagnosis can save your life." (Read the full article [Getting Back into the Race](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [Backsliding is like the frog in the kettle!](#)
- [What does it mean to backslide?](#)
- [Is a backsliding Christian still saved?](#)
- [If our salvation is eternally secure, why does the Bible warn so strongly against apostasy?](#)
- [If you doubt your salvation, does that mean you are not truly saved?](#)
- [Why are there so many fake Christians?](#)
- [Is there such a thing as an ex-Christian?](#)
- [Apostasy and Backsliding Look Alike - Erik Raymond](#)
- [Getting Back into the Race - Joel Beeke](#)

**Apostasy** is the Greek word **apostasia** (646) which means in general a departure, a falling away or defection as from the faith. **Apostasia** is used only twice in the NT. In Acts 21:21 **apostasia** describes the new Jewish (Christian) believers who have said they heard that Paul was teaching them to "**forsake** Moses" (the Law). In 2Thes 2:3 apostasia in context does not refer to genuine Christians who depart from the faith, but to "nominal" professors of an intellectual belief in Christ, who succumb to the Satanic deception of the Antichrist and reject all loyalty to Christ. **Apostasia** is used 3x in the Septuagint - Josh 22:22 ("rebellion" - Hebrew = mered), 2Chr 29:19 ("unfaithfulness" = maal), Jer 2:19 = ("apostasies", KJV = "backslidings" = meshubah)

Some sources such as the **Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia** feel that **apostasy** is possible only for those who say they are Christians but are only Christians **in name** (nominal Christians, "professors" not "possessors" -e.g., see 2Cor 13:5-note), having never truly been born again. Cases of deliberate, permanent rejection of Jesus and His Gospel are found in a number of NT passages - 1 Jn 2:22–23; Jude 1:4, Phil 3:18; 2 Pet 2:1; Heb 10:29. Clearly, these descriptions are a falling away by non-believers. As discussed below, as this discussion defines "**backsliding**," this term is not applied to individuals who fall away from the faith permanently.

A slipping begins secretly and imperceptibly in his heart,  
while appearances on the surface are kept unchanged.  
-- William Arnot

**John MacArthur** the respected expositor has this comment on the terms **backsliding** and **apostasy** in his commentary on Hebrews (in context of Hebrews 10:26-27)

A believer may sometimes lapse into sin and stray from intimacy with the Lord and with His people. But, unless the Lord disciplines him and takes him to heaven, he will come back. He will be too much under conviction to stay away permanently. In the meanwhile, he will be robbed of joy and peace and of many other blessings.

We cannot always determine who is **apostate** and who is **backsliding**, and we should not try. We are not able to distinguish between a **disobedient carnal believer** and an **apostate unbeliever**. (Ed: So in this description Dr MacArthur seems to equate apostate with and "apostate unbeliever" and "backsliding" with a "disobedient carnal believer.") That is the Lord's business. But there is a difference between the two, a very great difference. A person's concern should be first of all that he himself is a true believer (2 Cor. 13:5) and then that he is a faithful believer. **There are many calls to self-examination in the New Testament. Every time a believer comes to the Lord's Table, he faces the reality or unreality of his salvation.**

Paul distinguishes between **apostates** (Ed: Which MacArthur equates with those who have never been born again) and **disobedient, fleshly Christians** in his second letter to Timothy. "If we deny Him, He also will deny us," because we will be apostate and willingly will have no part in Him. But, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:12–13-[note](#) [Ed comment - Charles Ryrie agrees with MacArthur writing "we shall reign in our glorified state. Those who deny are **professing** people who will in turn be disowned by Him Mt. 10:33; 2 Jn 9]). If a believer falls short in his faithfulness to the Lord, the Lord still will not fail in His faithfulness to the believer, for He has promised never to let us go. "He cannot deny Himself," by falling short in His own faithfulness, no matter what His people do. A Christian can become weak in faith and disobedient, which is bad enough. But this is not denying the Lord, which is **apostasy**. The apostate habitually continues to disbelieve and habitually continues to sin. John tells us that "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in Him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9).

The two major characteristics of **apostasy**, then, are sufficient knowledge of the gospel to be saved and willful and habitual denial of God in spite of this knowledge. (Bolding mine) ([MacArthur NT Commentary](#))

I like **William Secker's** statement that "Though Christians be not kept altogether from falling, yet they are kept from falling altogether." Amen or Oh My!

**J. C. Ryle** - A stranded ship, an eagle with a broken wing, a garden covered with weeds, a harp without strings, a church in ruins—all these are sad sights, but a **backslider** is a sadder sight still.

We firmly believe that Scripture teaches that genuine believers can **"backslide."** but as alluded to above would quickly admit that a crisp definition of the quality and quantity of attitudes and actions of what constitutes **"backsliding"** is a somewhat "slippery slope" (pun intended)! Furthermore, we feel that a genuine believer's **"backsliding"** affects their **"state"** (their fellowship, their communion, their experiencing of the presence of God, cf 1 John 1:6-7) but **not** their **"standing"** (their position in Christ is eternal and forever secure! That is, if a person is genuinely justified by grace through faith they cannot be "un-justified!" They cannot lose their salvation. Or as John MacArthur puts it "If I could lose my salvation, I would." Born again believers cannot be "unborn"!

**Wayne Grudem** in his discussion of the **doctrine of perseverance of the saints** writes that...

this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, if rightly understood, should cause genuine worry, and even fear, in the hearts of any who are **"backsliding"** or **straying away from Christ**. (Ed: And as noted above Such persons must clearly be warned that only those who persevere to the end have been truly born again. And the reason they persevere to the end is because they have the Spirit of Christ within and He enables their perseverance). If they fall away from their **profession** (Ed: Contrast "*profession*" with "*possession*") of faith in Christ and a life of obedience to Him, they may not really be saved—in fact, the evidence that they are giving is that they are not saved and they never really were saved. Once they stop trusting in Christ and obeying Him (I am speaking in terms of *outward evidence*) they have no genuine assurance of salvation, and they should consider themselves unsaved, and turn to Christ in repentance and ask Him for forgiveness of their sins.

**Comment:** In other words Wayne Grudem like John MacArthur is not saying true believers won't "backslide," but that if committing sin becomes one's **continual direction**, one's **habitual practice**, one's **way of life for all of their life**, then there is very strong reason to suspect they are a **"backsliding professor"** (aka, a "backsliding non-believer", an apostate) and not a **"backsliding possessor"**, a believer who for a period of time is willfully choosing to stray from the safety of obedience to Christ and into the realm of darkness and sin. Here is the crucial caveat - A **"backsliding possessor"** will repent (see [metanoeo](#)) and return at some point in time. This is an important truth to digest for there are some well known Christian writers (e.g., Zane Hodges) who under the guise of "*grace*" propound a false doctrine that says something like this -- if an individual has ever "accepted Christ", it does not matter how they live thereafter, for they are "saved," even if for the rest of their life, they manifest unabated lawless behavior! Beloved, this is a lie, because grace that saves us is grace that also enables us to fight sin, not succumb to sin! This latter genre of **"backsliding"** (i.e., a professor, not a possessor of new life in Christ) is **not** what we are referring to in this discussion. As used in the present discussion, **"backsliding"** refers to **genuine born again men and women** who **temporarily** (this is critical = temporarily not permanently) turn away from the truth of the Gospel of Christ. Have you ever temporarily turned away from the truth? If we are honest, all of us have to one degree or another, because every time we willfully, volitionally, knowingly, presumptively sin we "miss the mark" and in a sense turn away from the truth. Paul warns against the danger of deception regarding false profession and true possession of Christ (E.g., read Eph 5:6-note and then the preceding context - Eph 5:3-5-note) Habitual

idolatry, covetousness or immorality characterize individuals who have no part of the kingdom of God (they are unsaved as indicated by their lifestyle)!

[Backsliding by Cameron Buettel](#) (Editorial Comment - This article sounds an alarm regarding loose use of the term '**Backsliding**' and if you think you know someone who is "backsliding" you might read this article [and/or have them read it] noting the numerous replies and comments from readers) Buettel writes "My early months as a Christian were a joyous feast of fellowship. There was nothing I loved more than to be with my new brothers and sisters in Christ. Every believer I knew seemed so sanctified and intimate with the Savior. I actually felt intimidated by lives that were seemingly lived on another plane of righteousness to my own sinful struggles. But it didn't take long before I discovered a sub-culture my Christian peers described as "**backsliders**." John MacArthur describes it as "a word that the prophets used of **apostate unbelievers**." **He concedes that Christians can backslide only in the sense that they "regress into a period of spiritual dullness or disobedience."** But he adds that such cases always incur God's discipline (Hebrews 12:6–11) and produce repentance. That idea captures what most Calvinists mean if they use the term "backslider." There is much that could be said about what constitutes a spiritual lapse, or how far you can go before you go too far. But the important principle to grasp is that the backsliding of a believer is always temporary and always involves God's chastening which in turn produces repentance. It never means that their salvation was temporarily lost." ([Click to read Buettel's entire article](#)) See Dr MacArthur's related messages - [Does Scripture Leave Room for Carnal Christians?](#) , [How Far Can Christians Go in Sinning?](#)

**So can you see the problem with the term "backslider"?** While Dr MacArthur on one hand says that as used by the OT prophets the term backslider referred to unbelievers, he does agree that "Christians can backslide." The respected expositor **Dr Adrian Rogers** gives his definition of a backslider stating that a "backslider is not an unsaved person....When the Bible uses the term backslider it's not talking about the lost, it is talking about the saved. You have to go somewhere in order to slide back. That is, you must have known the Lord before you can backslide away from the Lord. A lost person is just lost, but he's not a backslider because he's never known the Lord to slide back from the Lord. The backslider is not a lost person, he is a saved person out of fellowship with God." (from his sermon "The Backslider" on Proverbs 14:14, 2 Samuel 11:1-3 and Psalm 32:1-4).

Below are some **Bible dictionary** definitions of "**backsliding**" -

To wane in religious commitment, to become less arduous in piety or less upright in morals... The question arises whether Christians who backslide can lose their salvation. Those Christians known historically as Arminian in theology hold that believers can "fall from grace" and be lost. In such a case, backsliding amounts to total apostasy (**Ed**: A teaching that I think Scripture soundly refutes). Calvinists, on the other hand, insist that truly regenerated persons can never be lost. To Calvinists, **backsliding** means only loss of fellowship and effectiveness in the service of God, because their doctrine of perseverance teaches that God's elect will ultimately be saved (i.e., persevere in the faith). (Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible);

(**Backsliding** is used in Christian circles) to describe a person's return to questionable habits, to a loss of the sense of God's presence, or even to the "down" times that seem to be part of so many believers' emotional experiences. (L. Richards: New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words)

In the OT, **backsliding** speaks of a return or turn back of the old life of sin and the worship of false gods; in this day, a return to a former life of sin and spiritual idolatry, that is, to materialism and the worship of things rather than God. As used today in modern religious parlance, the term refers to the spiritual state of individual Christians. (The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia)

To wane in religious commitment, to become less arduous in piety or less upright in morals. (Tyndale Bible Dictionary)

(Backsliding is a) Condition that results from spiritual apathy or disregard for the things of God, whether on the part of an individual or a group bound by a prior covenantal pledge of commitment to uphold the doctrine and commandments of the Lord. Backsliding includes departure from a good confession of faith and from the ethical standards prescribed for God's people in the Scriptures. To varying degrees, depending on the extent of neglect of God and His commandments, the spiritually wayward experience a season of estrangement and abandonment from God and His people. (Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology)

## EVIDENCE OF A BACKSLIDDEN HEART

What are some **symptoms or signs** of a backslidden heart? These are in no particular order nor does any one or combination dogmatically label someone a backslider. As an aside, you will note that many of these markers are evidence of a person not filled with the Spirit, not walking by the Spirit. These are simply some "signposts" by which we might all seek to frequently and honestly

examine ourselves...

- (1) Formality in worship - "going through the motions" so to speak.
- (2) Absence of joy in general and of the things of God in particular.
- (3) Religious bondage - This is similar to #1. We find our religious "duties" onerous, and yet carry them out much like a dutiful albeit unloving wife who sees the marriage covenant as forever and seeks to fulfill her "duties" to her husband.
- (4) Uncontrollable anger, for when the Spirit fills us we are enabled to control our anger and our tongue (Eph 4:26-27, 29)
- (5) An unloving spirit that instead of looking for the best in others, continually puts the worst construction on their conduct.
- (6) A fault-finding spirit, judging even the motives of others, placing blame on others, judging them harshly.
- (7) Waning interest in the Word of Truth and Life. This may be one of the most telling and serious symptoms, because without the continual spiritual nourishment provided by the Word, we place ourselves in danger of backsliding even further!
- (8) A lack of interest in secret prayer (Ouch!)
- (9) A lack of interest in seeing souls saved and revived. Failure to pray for and/or share the Gospel with those dead in their trespasses and sins.
- (10) No interest in reports of revivals indicating a significant movement of the Spirit of God.
- (11) No significant interest in missions and outreach to the unreached people groups of the world.
- (12) No interest in benevolent enterprises (orphans, widows, poor, etc).
- (13) A lack of interest in holiness (progressive sanctification).
- (14) No interest in souls who are recently converted. (cp Lk 15:7, 10)
- (15) Prayers that are self/inward focused rather than others/outward focused.
- (16) Increasing interests for the things of the world than the things above (Col 3:1, 2).
- (17) A conscience that is not tender, not easily offended by sin.
- (18) Fear of man prevails over fear of God.

[John R Rice](#) summarizes the picture of backsliding with a series of questions (this is too close to home!) that help us face the issue squarely - "Was there ever a time when you were nearer to God than you are now? Was there ever a time when you read the Bible more, or enjoyed it more than now? Was there ever a time when you prayed more, when you had your prayers answered more frequently? Was there ever a day when you won more souls than you have won today? Was there ever a time when you were more completely absorbed in the Lord's business? If there was ever a time when you were nearer the Lord than today, you are a backslider. You have slid back from that close intimacy with God, from that high place of blessing which you once had." (Woe!)

## HOW TO BE REVIVED FROM BACKSLIDING

**One** could not do better than heed the gracious words of our Lord...

**Remember** (present imperative - Keep on remembering!) therefore from where you have fallen, and **repent** (aorist imperative - Just do it!) and **do** (aorist imperative - Just do it!) the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent. (Rev 2:5-[note](#))

## BACKSLIDING BELIEVERS: BAD ADVERTISEMENTS!

**Michael Bentley** offers some interesting insights on backsliding noting that...

Those who turn aside from following the Lord are sometimes called **backsliders**. They are still Christians who know Jesus as their Savior (**Ed comment**: This is an important caveat -- because a backsliding believer may be indistinguishable from a backsliding non-believer -- at least for a period of time), but they have lost the close intimacy and affection for Him which they once enjoyed (cp Rev 2:4). Instead of rejoicing in their Savior's



love for them and living radiant lives, they have become miserable and dejected. Instead of being a wonderful testimony to the goodness of God; it is now difficult to see the difference between them and the people of the world. In short, they are a **bad advertisement for Christianity**. A person who is in a backsliding state is the most miserable of people because he (or she) was once in a right relationship with the Lord, saved from sin, yet has fallen away from the blessedness of rejoicing in salvation (cf Ps 32:3-4-[note](#)). The person who is not a Christian is not so miserable because he has never known the joy of the Lord (cf Ps 51:8-[note](#), Ps 51:12-[note](#)), but the backslider has; that is why his condition is so serious (**Ed**: And so sad!)

Some backsliders indicate their sad state by quickly exploding in temper (as Saul did in 1Sa 20:30) when things go wrong, some go very quiet and become moody, and others start talking in an animated fashion about nothing in particular. From the time that David slew Goliath, everything seemed to have gone wrong for King Saul. David knew that he was in danger, so after several attempts on his life he ran away; and he kept on running away (see 1Sa 21:1, 10).

We, too, have days when we want to get away from everyone. We are tempted to give up our church allegiance and leave all the worrying and care to others. Pastors are particularly prone to this feeling. The sheer stress of life can cause great depression. That is how we find David in 1Sa 21 and 1Sa 22. Sad to say, in his poor spiritual state, he started to drift away from God. His faith in the Lord, which had once been so firm and strong had now become weak and flabby. ([Michael Bentley: Face2Face with David Vol. 1: Encountering the Man after God's Heart](#))

## **BACKSLIDING IS AKIN TO SPIRITUAL ADULTERY!**

**ISBE** has an interesting note on the meaning of **backsliding** explaining that...

In all places (in the OT) the word (**backslide**) is used of **Israel forsaking Yahweh**, and with a reference to the **covenant** relation between Yahweh and the nation, conceived as a marriage tie which Israel had violated (**Ed**: Related Resource: Covenant of Marriage). Yahweh was Israel's Husband (Isa 54:5, Jer 31:32, Hos 2:19), and by her idolatries with other gods she had proved unfaithful (Jeremiah 3:8,14; 14:7; Hosea 14:4).

As someone has well said - **Backsliding** begins when **knee-bending** stops!

**Paul Little** explained backsliding this way "Collapse in the Christian life is seldom a blowout. It is usually a slow leak!"

The **KJV** uses the term **backsliding** more often than any other translation and it is found mainly in the Book of Jeremiah where it refers to the lapse of the **nation of Israel** into paganism and idolatry. - Jer 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 22; 8:5; 31:22; 49:4; Hos 4:16; 11:7; 14:4. While "backsliding" in this OT sense is national, it is nevertheless clear that individual believers can and do backslide. Peter's denial of Christ is surely such an example, and yet we see that he comes to his senses and does not remain in his state of denial of His Lord. In a sense, every time we commit sins, we temporarily "backslide" and for we deny our Lord's right to rule over our lives!

**Could it happen to you? Could it happen to me?** Clearly the answer is "yes." I am reminded of Paul's warning in First Corinthians that if any man or woman thinks he or she stands, then they had better take heed lest they fall! (1 Cor 10:12) One of the greatest psalms is Psalm 119, a song in which the writer clearly has the Word of God at the forefront of his mind as he repeatedly extols its virtues in every one of the 176 stanzas. And yet when we come to the very last stanza of this great psalm, the writer ends his discourse with a surprising confession and prayer, which sounds like the cry of a man who has experienced backsliding...

**I have gone astray like a lost sheep, Seek** (Plea in this context of a prayer) **thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments.** (Psalm 119:176)

**Spurgeon comments:** This is the finale: **I have gone astray like a lost sheep**—often, willfully, wantonly, and even hopelessly, but for Thine interposing grace. Before I was afflicted, and before You had fully taught me Your statutes, I went astray from the practical precepts, from the instructive doctrines, and from the heavenly experiences which You had set before me (See Ps 119:67. I lost my road, and I lost myself. Even now I am apt to wander, and, in fact, have roamed already; therefore, Lord, restore me.

**Seek thy servant.** He was not like a dog, that somehow or other can find its way back; but he was like a lost sheep, which goes further and further away from home; yet still he was a sheep, and the Lord's sheep, His property, and precious in His sight, and therefore he hoped to be sought in order to be restored. However far he might have wandered he was still not only a sheep, but God's "servant," and therefore he desired to be in his Master's house again, and once more honored with commissions for his Lord. Had he been only a lost sheep he would not have prayed to be sought; but being also a "servant" he had the power to

pray. He cries, **Seek thy servant**, and he hoped to be not only sought, but forgiven, accepted, and taken into work again by his gracious Master.

Notice this confession; many times (In Ps 119) he has defended his own innocence against foul-mouthed accusers, but when he comes into the presence of the Lord his God he is ready enough to confess his transgressions. Here he sums up, not only his past, but even his present life, under the image of a sheep which has broken from its pasture, forsaken the flock, left the shepherd, and brought itself into the wild wilderness, where it has become as a lost thing. The sheep bleats... **Seek thy servant**. His argument is a forcible one—for **I do not forget thy commandments**. I know the right, I approve and admire the right; what is more, I love the right, and long for it. I cannot be satisfied to continue in sin, I must be restored to the ways of righteousness. I have a home-sickness after my God, I pine after the ways of peace; I do not and I cannot forget Thy commandments, nor cease to know that I am always happiest and safest when I scrupulously obey them and find all my joy in doing so. Now, if the **grace of God** enables us to maintain in our hearts the loving memory of God's commandments it will surely yet restore us to practical holiness. We cannot be utterly lost if our heart is still with God. If we be gone astray in many respects, yet still, if we be true in our soul's inmost desires, we shall be found again, and fully restored. Yet, let us remember the first verse of the psalm while reading the last: the major blessedness lies not in being restored from wandering, but in being upheld in a blameless way even to the end (Ps 119:1). Be it ours to keep the crown of the causeway, never leaving the King's Highway for By-path Meadow, or any other flowery path of sin. May the Lord uphold us even to the end. Yet even then we shall not be able to boast with the Pharisee, but shall still pray with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and with the psalmist, **Seek thy servant**.

The **ESV** has these occurrences of **backsliding** - **backslider** (Pr 14:14ESV - Hebrew = sug, [05472](#)), **backsliding** (Isaiah 57:17ESV - Heb= sobab, [07726](#) = adjective = faithless, always turning away, prone to wander from Jehovah), **backsliding** (Jer 8:5ESV= Meshubah, [04878](#)), **backslidings** (Jer 14:7ESV = meshubah [04878](#))

Proverbs 14:14ESV The **backslider** in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways, and a good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways.

**Comment:** (See also [William Arnot](#) - [THE BACKSLIDER](#) ) Notice that the problem of the backslider is a problem of his or her heart! This is the most serious form of "heart" disease for it effects our soul, as well as our body (cp Ps 32:3,4). This verse should frighten any sane person, that God would allow the willful rebel to be satiated or "filled to satisfaction" with the rotten fruit of their evil ways! Notice also the unavoidable axiom that we will always reap what we sow. We are prone to forget this changeless warning, choosing instead to deceptively reason that sin is sweet or its such a "little" thing or "I won't do this again" or "God will forgive me," etc. Our old flesh nature is a masterful liar and continually seeks to deceive us into believing we can sin and "get away with it" so to speak. Paul confronts this lie with a warning and then the rationale behind the warning (as well as a encouragement and logic for sowing good seed)...

**Do not be deceived** (planao in the present imperative with a negative = stop this or don't let it begin!), God is not **mocked**; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. (Gal 6:7-note, Gal 6:8-note, Gal 6:9-note)

Jer 8:2ESV Why then has this people (Israel) turned away in perpetual **backsliding**? They hold fast to deceit; they refuse to return.

Jer 14:7ESV "Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O LORD, for Your Name's sake; for our **backslidings** are many; we have sinned against You.

**Comment:** Notice that this is a prayer for deliverance from the deceitful trap of backsliding, which is equated with repeated sin ("many") against Jehovah. Remember that all sin is primarily against God. The basis of the prayer for God to act in mercy and grace is not because of their worth or goodness, etc, but for the sake of God's great Name. Indeed, God's children are always a reflection to the world of His glory and character and backsliding children gravely, grossly distort the true image of their Father to a watching, already skeptical unbelieving world! The NLT paraphrase emphasizes this point paraphrasing it "help us for the sake of Your reputation."

**Backsliding** is found 12x in the KJV...

Proverbs 14:14 The **backslider** in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

Jeremiah 2:19 Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy **backslidings** (NAS = apostasies; meshubah = [04878](#); Lxx = apostasia = rebellion, desertion, defection, changing loyalties) shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

Jeremiah 3:6 The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which **backsliding** (NAS = faithless; meshubah = [04878](#)) Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.

**Comment: Meshubah** ([04878](#)) is a noun which describes a turning back or turning away from a former allegiance or devotion and is translated "backsliding" 11 times in the **KJV**. The **NAS** translates it apostasies(3), apostasy(2), faithless(4), faithlessness(1), turning(1), waywardness(1). In Pr 1:32 it describes "waywardness". Notice again that the translators do not seem to make a clear distinction between **backsliding** and **apostasy**.

Jeremiah 3:8 And I saw, when for all the causes whereby **backsliding** (NAS = faithless; meshubah = [04878](#)) Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

Jeremiah 3:11 And the LORD said unto me, The **backsliding** (NAS = faithless; meshubah = [04878](#)) Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.

Jeremiah 3:12 Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou **backsliding** (NAS = faithless; meshubah = [04878](#)) Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever.

Jeremiah 3:14 Turn, O **backsliding** children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion:

Jeremiah 3:22 Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your **backslidings**. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.

**KJV Study Bible** - Backsliding implied a stubborn and rebellious attitude on the part of ancient Israel and may have referred either to their forsaking the covenant (in whole or in part), or to their failure to grow spiritually according to God's progressive revelation. Application: The term is often applied today to Christians who have fallen into sin, but it could also apply to those who have failed to grow spiritually (cf. Paul's use of carnal in 1Cor 3:1-3). The cause of backsliding is the desire to do things our way rather than God's way (Pr 14:14). Christians should be careful to follow the Lord and grow in grace so as not to backslide.

Jeremiah 5:6 Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their **backslidings** (NAS = apostasies; meshubah = [04878](#); Lxx = apostrophe = a turning away from correct behavior or belief - faithlessness) are increased.

Jeremiah 8:5 Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual **backsliding** (NAS = apostasy; meshubah = [04878](#); Lxx = apostropho = turn away from correct behavior or belief - active voice = they made a willful choice to turn away)? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return.

Jeremiah 14:7 O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake: for our **backslidings** (meshubah = [04878](#) NAS = apostasies, NIV = backsliding, NET = we have turned away; HCSB = rebellions) are many; we have sinned against thee.

Jeremiah 31:22 How long wilt thou go about, O thou **backsliding** daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.

Jeremiah 49:4 Wherefore gloriest thou in the valleys, thy flowing valley, O **backsliding** daughter? that trusted in her treasures, saying, Who shall come unto me?

Hosea 4:16 For Israel **slideth back** as a **backsliding** heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place.

Hosea 11:7 And my people are bent to **backsliding** from me (ESV & NET = turning away from me): though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.

Hosea 14:4 I will heal their **backsliding**, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.

**Comment:** meshubah = [04878](#) = "waywardness"; NAS & ESV = apostasy, NET = waywardness, NAS = ) is from the same root



as (shuvah, "return!") in Hos 14:1. This repetition of (shuv) creates a wordplay which emphasizes reciprocity -- if Israel will return (shuvah) to the LORD, He will cure her of the tendency to turn away from Him.

## BACKSLIDING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

While the word "**backsliding**" is not present in the NT, the concept is indirectly implied. For example, the NT **backsliding believer** will receive chastening (discipline and scourging) from their Father (See Heb 12:5-11-note, cf, 1 Cor 11:32), will temporarily lose fellowship or communion (1 John 1:6-7-note), may be temporarily removed from the local body of believers (1 Cor 5:5), may experience weakness, illness or even death (1 Cor 11:30), and may lose rewards (cf. 2 Cor 5:10-note; 1 Cor 3:15). Demas is an interesting character study, who some would say is an example of **backsliding** (implying he was a genuine believer) but others would say was guilty of **apostasy** (with the sense that Demas was never genuinely saved.)

**Warren Wiersbe** writes that...

Most Christians do not jump into sin and get away from God's will. They gradually decline spiritually, then find themselves in trouble and wonder how it happened. They leave their first love (Rev. 2:4-note) and start living for the flesh and not the Spirit (Gal. 3:1-3). That is why our Lord admonished us to **watch** and **pray** (both in the present imperative - Mt 26:41-note). When we least expect it, the germ of sin can enter the system. [With the Word: Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Handbook. Nelson](#)

**Unger** writes that...

In the NT backsliding is set forth as involving a change of the believer's state before God but not of his standing. The former is variable and depends upon daily contact with Christ, "if we walk in the light" (1 John 1:7) and many other factors of the spiritual life. Standing, by contrast, refers to the believer's position "in Christ," which is grounded in the unchangeable and perfect work of Christ for the believer, whereas state describes the changing and imperfect condition of his soul from moment to moment as affected by backsliding on the one hand or spiritual progress on the other. Faith in Christ secures standing (John 1:12; Rom. 5:1-2; 8:17; Eph. 1:3, 6; Col. 2:10; Heb. 10:19; etc.), but observance of all the laws of the spiritual life alone assures protection against backsliding. Compare 1 Cor. 1:2-9 (standing) with 1 Cor. 1:11; 3:1-4; 4:18; 5:2 (state). Backsliding not only results in a changed state or experience but involves corrective chastening (Heb. 12:6; 1 Cor. 11:31), loss of rewards and fellowship (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 John 3:10), curtailment of usefulness, and in extreme cases physical death (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 John 5:16) that the "spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." [\(The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Chicago: Moody Press\)](#)

## ARE YOU DRIFTING FROM GOD?

**John Piper** comments on Ps 119:176 noting that at the terminus of one of the most wonderful psalms in Scripture, the psalmist makes a declaration the picture of which is that of the confession of one who has become backslidden! Here is Piper's message.

## THE ANATOMY OF BACKSLIDING

**John Piper**

### Introduction

The truth about our experience is that we fail to live at the level of holiness that we know is fitting for a follower of Christ. We need to see how this same reality of imperfection turns up in the saints of Scripture and how they handled it.

### The Structure of Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is the most sustained act of praise and commitment to the Word of God in all the Bible.

It is composed of 22 stanzas of 8 verses each. Each of the 22 stanzas is built on a different Hebrew letter, of which there are 22 in the Hebrew alphabet. In each of the stanzas, each of the eight verses begins with the letter of that stanza.

### Why This Structure?

It is the sort of thing you do when you "delight in the law of the Lord" (Psalm 1:2) and when you believe (with Psalm 19:7-10) that:

The law of the Lord is perfect,

reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the Lord is sure,  
making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is pure,  
enlightening the eyes;  
the fear of the Lord is clean,  
enduring for ever;  
the ordinances of the Lord are true,  
and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.

It is a way of passing the time of night or day rolling the Word over in your mind, seeing how many different angles you can see.

It is a reveling in the riches of the Word. Like when we wanted to honor Elsie, we took the letters of her name and thought up words to describe her.

### **The Background for the Shocking Last Verse**

That is the background for the last verse of the psalm, a verse that comes as a shock, because there is nothing quite like it anywhere else in the psalm—a confession that, in spite of all that has gone before, he has now backslidden and gone astray. Verse 176:

I have gone astray like a lost sheep;  
seek thy servant,  
for I do not forget thy commandments.

### **Three Parts to the Anatomy of Backsliding**

#### **1. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep . . . "**

The saints sometimes go astray.

- He was a saint:
  - his love for the law—Ps 119:97
  - his life of prayer—Ps 119:145, 147 (whole psalm!)
  - his persistent praise of the Word—Ps 119:164
  - his track record of obedience—Ps 119: 22, 100f., 110, 121
- He went astray:
  - he admits it openly in this verse—Ps 119:176
  - it is not the first time—Ps 119:67
  - the battle will not be over to the end of life; perhaps this is why he puts it last: after all his success the battle for holiness goes on!
- Like a lost sheep:
  - "lost" in Hebrew also means perishing
  - sheep will die if not found

#### **2. " . . . seek your servant . . . "**

True saints cry out to be found when straying.

- He is not content to stray.
- He admits his need of help: "Seek me!"
- How does he anticipate God's intervention?
  - be gracious—Ps 119:58
  - revive me—Ps 119:25

- open my eyes—Ps 119:18 (cf. Ps 119:129!)
- incline my heart—Ps 119:36, 37., 112 (cf. Ps 119:165!)
- teach me—Ps 119:12, 26, 27, 29, etc.
- strengthen me—Ps 119:28, 133
- afflict me—Ps 119: 67, 71

Note: though he gives God the tribute of having power to rescue him, he does not fault God for his straying. God is not guilty that I am prone to wander. He is not bound to rescue me in any time but his own, if at all.

What is the saint's assurance of God's willingness to seek him?

### 3. " . . . for I do not forget your commandments."

True saints cannot erase the law that has been written on their heart by the Spirit of God. They remain there beckoning and enticing.

The spiritual taste for God cannot be wholly obliterated in the heart of the saints.

Saints not only call on God to seek them, they seek God through his Word. "Not forgetting" is a litotes for "really remember and call to mind."

- Especially the "commandments" to believe God's promises (Proverbs 3:5–6).
- Ezekiel 34:11–12, "I will seek my sheep."
- Luke 19:10, "Son of man came to seek"
- John 10:27–29, "I will keep my sheep"
- Luke 15:3–4, he leaves the 99 to find one.
- Jude 24–25, "He is able to keep you."

Connection to Communion:

- Isaiah 53:6—"All we like sheep . . ."
- John 10:11—"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." [Desiringgod.org](http://Desiringgod.org))

## BACKSLIDING

### J C Ryle

The pithy evangelical writer, **J C Ryle** (1816-1900 - [read a short biography](#)) has the following "thoughts" relative to backsliding...

Men fall in private long before they fall in public.

Backsliding, generally first begins with neglect of private prayer.

If we know anything of true, saving religion, let us ever beware of the beginnings of backsliding.

It is a miserable thing to be a backslider. Of all unhappy things that can befall a man, I suppose it is the worst. A stranded ship, an eagle with a broken wing, a garden covered with weeds, a harp without strings, a church in ruins — all these are sad sights, but a backslider is a sadder sight still.

I am trying, as God shall help me, to set the story of your backsliding in relationship to the spiritual and infinite. Shall I put that story in slightly different language? You corrupted yourself in that hour when you ceased your devotion to the God of your mother, and ceased to hand over your life wholly and absolutely to Christ. Your backsliding proceeded when you put into the place of Christ something else. It may have been your business. It may have been your very passion for knowledge. It may have been a far more mean and paltry thing than either of these, your pursuit of pleasure. You put something where Christ used to be. You who once took of your talents, and time, and strength, and poured them out in sacrificial service in the cause of Christ have been worshiping with all the soul, with all the heart, and with all the mind, wealth, fame, pleasure, I know not what. You know. There is your graven image. The result has been that this week, in the prosecution of your business, in the pursuit of your pleasure, you have done things which, if you thought I could proclaim them in your name from this pulpit, would cause you to blush and hurry from the building. You did not begin here. You began with the lowered ideal. You continued with the false deity, and the hour has come in which your hands in

the sanctuary are unclean with deeds of evil, and you know your very heart has become polluted. That is the process of backsliding.

The Lord Jesus will not cast away His believing people because of shortcomings and infirmities. The husband does not put away his wife because he finds failings in her. The mother does not forsake her infant because it is weak, feeble and ignorant. And the Lord Christ does not cast off poor sinners who have committed their souls into His hands, because He sees in them blemishes and imperfections. Oh, no, it is His glory to pass over the faults of His people, and heal their backslidings, to make much of their weak graces, and to pardon their many faults.

## PSALM 119:176 COMMENTARY

C H Spurgeon

**I have gone astray like a lost sheep** (What should we pray when we have gone astray?). **Seek** (Piel - ; Imperative - form of a command, reflecting boldness before the throne of grace! cp He 4:16-; He 10:19) **thy servant**, (Why should God seek His servant?) **for I do not forget thy commandments.**

**Spurgeon commenting on this passage writes:** This is the finale: **I have gone astray like a lost sheep**—often, willfully, wantonly, and even hopelessly, but for thine interposing grace. Before I was afflicted, and before thou hadst fully taught me thy statutes, I went astray from the practical precepts, from the instructive doctrines, and from the heavenly experiences which thou hadst set before me. I lost my road, and I lost myself. Even now I am apt to wander, and, in fact, have roamed already; therefore, Lord, restore me.

**Seek thy servant.** He was not like a dog, that somehow or other can find its way back; but he was like a lost sheep, which goes further and further away from home; yet still he was a sheep, and the Lord's sheep, his property, and precious in his sight, and therefore he hoped to be sought in order to be restored. However far he might have wandered he was still not only a sheep, but God's "servant," and therefore he desired to be in his Master's house again, and once more honored with commissions for his Lord. Had he been only a lost sheep he would not have prayed to be sought; but being also a "servant" he had the power to pray. He cries, **Seek thy servant**, and he hoped to be not only sought, but forgiven, accepted, and taken into work again by his gracious Master.

Notice this confession; many times in the psalm the writer has defended his own innocence against foul-mouthed accusers, but when he comes into the presence of the Lord his God he is ready enough to confess his transgressions. Here he sums up, not only his past, but even his present life, under the image of a sheep which has broken from its pasture, forsaken the flock, left the shepherd, and brought itself into the wild wilderness, where it has become as a lost thing. The sheep bleats, and David prays, **Seek thy servant.** His argument is a forcible one—**for I do not forget thy commandments** I know the right, I approve and admire the right; what is more, I love the right, and long for it. I cannot be satisfied to continue in sin, I must be restored to the ways of righteousness. I have a home-sickness after my God, I pine after the ways of peace; I do not and I cannot forget thy commandments, nor cease to know that I am always happiest and safest when I scrupulously obey them and find all my joy in doing so. Now, if the grace of God enables us to maintain in our hearts the loving memory of God's commandments it will surely yet restore us to practical holiness. We cannot be utterly lost if our heart is still with God. If we be gone astray in many respects, yet still, if we be true in our soul's inmost desires, we shall be found again, and fully restored. Yet, let us remember the first verse of the psalm while reading the last: the major blessedness lies not in being restored from wandering, but in being upheld in a blameless way even to the end. Be it ours to keep the crown of the causeway, never leaving the King's Highway for By-path Meadow, or any other flowery path of sin. May the Lord uphold us even to the end. Yet even then we shall not be able to boast with the Pharisee, but shall still pray with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and with the psalmist, **Seek thy servant.** ([Treasury of David](#))

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**David Guzik** gives us a powerful metaphor for the subtle nature of backsliding, even invisible to the backslider himself or herself! (By the way, that's also a descriptive definition of "deceived"! The deceived person by definition does not know it! So don't be deceived! Look at your face in the mirror of God's Word -- if it's "dirty" wash it with the water of the Word and the soul cleansing soap of repentance!)

Are you **backsliding**? The signs may not be so obvious to others. When you see a tree broken over in a windstorm, it's easy to think that it was the wind. If you look closer, you will often see that insects have been at work a long time on the tree, making it weaker and weaker. It really wasn't the wind that did it - other trees around it withstood the wind. It was the slow decline of strength, as insects nibbled away month after month. (From Comments on Hoses 14:4).

**Dr. Payson** warns that...

"The symptoms of spiritual decline are like those which attend the decay of bodily health. It generally commences with loss of appetite and a disrelish for wholesome food, prayer, reading the Scriptures and devotional books. Whenever you perceive these symptoms, be alarmed, for your spiritual health is in danger: apply immediately to the great Physician for a cure."

**J. Oswald Sanders** writes that...

We must not just take it for granted that we are in touch with God. Joseph and Mary lost a whole day of fellowship with Jesus because they "supposed him to be in the company." They took for granted something of which they should have made sure. "He [Samson] wist not that the Lord had departed from him" (Judges 16:20). He was out of touch with God and did not know it. (Sanders, J O: The Best That I Can Be. Overseas Missionary Fellowship Books. 1984)

**Warren Wiersbe** commenting on Jer 2:19 that...

A basic principle is enunciated in verse 19: God punishes us by allowing our own sins to bring pain and discipline to our lives. "Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is!" (Jer 4:18NIV) "Your wrongdoings have kept these [rains] away; your sins have deprived you of good" (Jer 5:25NIV).

**The greatest judgment God can send to disobedient people is to let them have their own way and reap the sad, painful consequences of their sins. (Ed comment: This certainly applies to Samson. Is there some pet sin you are holding onto, even "cultivating"? You can be sure that the harvest will be bitter fruit even as it was in Samson's life! Gal 6:7-note, Gal 6:8-note)**

The word "**backsliding**" literally means "**to turn away**" and describes the nation's repeated apostasy. The Book of Judges records at least seven occasions when Israel turned from the Lord and had to be chastened, and there were numerous other times during the period of the monarchy when the Israelites deliberately turned from the Lord. The word "backslide" is not used in the New Testament, but the experience is described in other ways: falling from grace (Gal 5:4), leaving your first love (Rev 2:4-[note](#)), loving the world (1Jn 2:15-note, 1Jn 2:16-note, 1Jn 2:17-note; 2Ti 4:10-note), and walking in darkness (1Jn 1:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). [Wiersbe, W. W. Be Decisive. An Old testament study on Jeremiah- Victor](#)

**Theodore H. Epp** a well known Bible expositor warns that...

Backsliding starts in such a subtle way that most of us are not aware of it, and many of us may be backslidden and may not realize it.

**C E Macartney** once explained the danger of backsliding noting that...

Between an airplane and every other form of locomotion and transportation there is one great contrast. The horse and wagon, the automobile, the bicycle, the locomotive, the speedboat, and the great battleship—all can come to a standstill without danger, and they can all reverse their engines, or their power, and go back. But there is no reverse about the engine of an airplane. It cannot back up. It dare not stand still. If it loses its momentum and forward-drives, then it crashes. The only safety for the airplane is in its forward and upward motion. The only safe direction for the Christian to take is forward and upward. If he stops, or if he begins to slip and go backward, that moment he is in danger.

**Mike Yaconelli** wrote the following illustration on backsliding in the Wittenberg Door...

"I live in a small, rural community. There are lots of cattle ranches around here, and, every once in a while, a cow wanders off and gets lost. Ask a rancher how a cow gets lost, and chances are he will reply, 'Well, the cow starts nibbling on a tuft of green grass, and when it finishes, it looks ahead to the next tuft of green grass and starts nibbling on that one, and then it nibbles on a tuft of grass right next to a hole in the fence. It then sees another tuft of green grass on the other side of the fence, so it nibbles on that one and then goes on to



the next tuft. The next thing you know, the cow has nibbled itself into being lost.' " Most people don't deliberately set out to backslide, but following their appetites or desires from one tuft to the next, they nibble themselves through the fence and off the straight and narrow path. (A dramatic illustration of Samson's wanderlust)

**Jerry White** observes a truth many believers have experienced at one time or another...

No one is so empty as the man who has stopped walking with God and doesn't know it.

**F W Boreham** alludes to the Christian's journey through the tempestuous, tempting seas of life noting that...

The captain gives earnest heed to the charts lest he drift unconsciously shoreward!

The **writer of Hebrews** adds that in light of the truth of the superiority of our Captain Christ Jesus...

"We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." (Hebrews 2:1)

**Predisposition to "drifting" backward...**

(1). Time: A slow drift, given enough time, will carry you to another continent and its dark uncharted waters.

(2). Familiarity with the truth. It is natural for us to come to regard the familiar as commonplace. The initial venture into the mysteries of Christ will leave us exhilarated. But with the repeated journeys, some become bored tourists.

(3) Danger of busyness: We who live at the end of the twentieth century are busy people, and the multiplicity of our cares and duties can overwhelm us. A snowflake is a tiny thing, but when the air is full of them, they can bury us. Even so, the thousand cares of each day can insulate us from the stupendous excellencies of Christ, causing us to begin a deadly drift. The drifting that comes through the combination of years, familiarity, and busyness often bares its existence when the storm of opposition comes. The anchor has long been loosed, and when the winds come, an eternal soul is suddenly on the rocks and shipwrecked.

Here is a fascinating illustration of drifting the wrong direction ("backsliding")...

The danger and deceitfulness of drifting is illustrated by the story of the English explorer, William Edward Parry, who took a crew to the Arctic Ocean. They wanted to go farther north to continue their chartings, so they calculated their location by the stars and started a very difficult and treacherous march north. They walked hour upon hour, and finally, totally exhausted, they stopped. Taking their bearings again from the stars, they discovered that they were farther south than they had been when they started. They had been walking on an ice floe that was moving south faster than they were walking north. How many people are out with step to God, thinking that they are walking with Him, when in fact they are moving away from Him faster than they are supposedly walking toward Him. That is the tragedy of drifting from the truth. Will you awaken one day ("come to your senses") to find, like Parry's crew, that all the time you have been moving imperceptibly in the wrong direction.

In his poem "**Let Me Get Home Before Dark**" **Dr. Robertson McQuilkin** offers a prayer that alludes to subtle drifting...

I fear the Dark Spectre may come too soon—or do I mean, too late?  
That I should end before I finish or finish, but not well.  
That I should stain your honor, shame your name, grieve your loving heart.  
Few, they tell me, finish well...  
Lord, let me get home before dark.

The venerable preacher **Charles Simeon** (see John Piper's summation of this man's amazing ministry - [Brothers, We Must Not Mind a Little Suffering](#)) once warned that...

However advanced a man may be in piety or age, he is still in danger of falling.

**F. W. Norwood** wrote that...

Life's greatest tragedy is to lose God and not to miss Him.

**Thomas à Kempis**

Whoever strives to withdraw from obedience withdraws from grace

**C H Spurgeon** (read his miraculous testimony) spoke a great deal about backsliding warning that...

You, who have the most familiarity with Christ, and enjoy the most holy fellowship with him, may soon become the very leaders of the hosts of Satan if your Lord withdraws His grace. David's eyes go astray, and the sweet psalmist of Israel becomes the shameless adulterer, who robs Uriah of his wife. Samson one day slays a thousand of his enemies with the might of his arm and the valor of his heart; another day his honor is betrayed, his locks are shorn, and his eyes are put out by a strumpet's treacherous wiles. How soon are the mighty fallen!...

Christian, what do you have to do with sin? Has it not cost you enough already? What, man! Have you forgotten the times of your conviction? If you have, I have not! Burnt child, will you play with the fire? What! When you have already been rent in pieces by the lion, will you step a second time into his den? Have you not had enough of the old serpent? Did he not poison all your veins once?

So mature a servant of the devil as Judas is not purchased all at once. It takes time to educate a man for the scorner's seat. If you begin to slip on the side of a mountain of ice, the first slip may not hurt if you can stop and slide no further. But alas, you cannot so regulate sin! When your feet begin to slide, the rate of the descent increases, and the difficulty of arresting this motion is incessantly becoming greater. It is dangerous to backslide in any degree, for we know not to what it may lead.

The Christian life is very much like climbing a hill of ice. You cannot slide up. You have to cut every step with an ice ax. Only with incessant labor in cutting and chipping can you make any progress. If you want to know how to backslide, leave off going forward. Cease going upward and you will go downward of necessity. You can never stand still.

Remember that if you are a child of God, you will never be happy in sin. You are spoiled for the world, the flesh, and the devil. When you were regenerated there was put into you a vital principle, which can never be content to dwell in the dead world. You will have to come back, if indeed you belong to the family.

**Here are several pithy quotes from unknown sources...**

- Never look back unless you want to go that way
- However deep you fall, you are never out of God's reach
- Life's greatest tragedy is to lose God and not miss Him
- If you are not as close to God as you used to be, you do not have to guess who moved

**John Chrysostom** wrote that...

If repentance is neglected for an instant, one can lose the power of the Resurrection as he lives with the weakness of tepidity and the potential of his fall.

**John Blanchard** reasons that...

Backsliding never begins with a loud bang... it begins quietly, slowly, subtly, insidiously... It is possible to be diligent in our religion, yet distant in our relationship.

The following tale illustrates the subtle nature of **backsliding**...

A foolish old farmer, so the story goes, concluded one day that the oats he had fed his mule for years were simply costing him too much. So he hatched a plan: he mixed a little sawdust in with the feed, and then a little more the next day, and even more the next, each time reducing the amount of oats in the mix. The mule didn't seem to notice the gradual change, so the farmer thought things were fine and kept decreasing the proportion of oats. But weeks later, on the day he finally fed the poor beast nothing but sawdust, the mule finished the meal and fell over dead. A silly tale, perhaps, but it serves as a parable of the backslider—the Christian who slips further and further away from God through unrepented sin or neglect. Though we know our souls cannot survive on spiritual sawdust, we may well convince ourselves that a little won't hurt too much, and a little less real spiritual food won't be missed. Then, over time, the proportion of sawdust increases while the oats gradually disappear. Before long, the change is complete, and our starved, sawdust-stuffed spiritual life has collapsed.

**J C Ryle**...

If we know anything of true, saving religion, let us ever beware of the beginnings of backsliding.

**Thomas Guthrie** addressed the subtle and deceptive nature of backsliding writing that...

If you find yourself loving any pleasure more than your prayers, any book better than the Bible, any house better than the house of the Lord, any table better than the Lord's table, any persons better than Christ, or any indulgence better than the hope of heaven — be alarmed.

**Charles Simeon...**

However advanced a man may be in piety or age, he is still in danger of falling.

**Ernest Plant** pithily explains the roots of backsliding...

*Backsliding* is caused by *slack abiding*.

**C H Spurgeon** warns all backsliders...

It is dangerous to backslide in any degree, for we know not to what may lead. It may **behard** going forward, but it is **worse** going back.

With **deep repentance** and **sincere faith**, find your way back from your backsliding. It is your duty, for you have turned away from Him Whom you professed to serve. It is your wisdom, for you cannot strive against Him and prosper. It is your immediate necessity, for what He has done is nothing compared to what He may do in the way of chastisement, since He is Almighty to punish.

Backsliders begin with **dusty** Bibles and end with **filthy** garments!

You, who have the most familiarity with Christ, and enjoy the most holy fellowship with him, may soon become the very leaders of the hosts of Satan if your Lord withdraws His grace. David's eyes go astray, and the sweet psalmist of Israel becomes the shameless adulterer, who robs Uriah of his wife. Samson one day slays a thousand of his enemies with the might of his arm and the valor of his heart; another day his honor is betrayed, his locks are shorn, and his eyes are put out by a strumpet's treacherous wiles. How soon are the mighty fallen!

Behold Solomon, the wisest of men, yet the greatest fool who ever lived. Even Job fails in patience, and Abraham, staggers as to his faith.

**D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** speaks of the tragedy of backsliding observing that...

The backslider is a man who, because of relationship to God, never really enjoys anything else.

**Billy Graham...**

Satan rejoices when old habits overwhelm [us] and we cave in to the pressure of the crowd... perhaps temptation lures [us] into sin... a backsliding Christian compromises their faith and causes unbelievers to mock the Gospel.

**Donald Grey Barnhouse** once said that...

Withering is a slow process, barely perceptible at first either to one who is being withered or to those who look on.

**Lehman Strauss...**

Every human need, every case of backsliding is a call to prayer.

**A W Tozer...**

In every Christian's heart there is a cross and a throne, and the Christian is on the throne till he puts himself on the cross; if he refuses the cross, he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the **backsliding** and worldliness among Gospel believers today. We want to be saved, but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king within the little kingdom of Mansoul and wear our tinsel crown with all the pride of a Caesar; but we doom ourselves to shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility.

**Vance Havner** described revival as...

Revivals should not be necessary. God never meant that His people should live by fits and starts in alternate periods of backsliding and repenting. But since we have such "*malaria*" Christianity (a fever and a chill, a fever and a chill) we shall have need of revivals. If we walked with God and kept ourselves prayed up, it would not

be necessary to call in preachers every six months to stir up the church. If we had more "*viva!*" we would not need *re-viva!*. We would live in normal spiritual health all the time without shots in the arm twice a year.

## THE DANGER OF BACKSLIDING

Charles Simeon

[Prov. 14:14](#). The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

THOUGH God does not select those as objects of his mercy, who are most diligent in external duties, yet he increases his favours to those whom he has chosen, in proportion as they themselves are earnest in improving what he has already bestowed upon them. In the dispensations of his providence it is generally found, that "the diligent hand maketh rich;" but in the dispensations of his grace, this seems to be an unalterable rule of his procedure: "his ways with respect to these things are equal;" "whatsoever a man sows, that he may assuredly expect to reap:" "to him that hath, shall be given, and he shall have abundance." To this effect are the declarations before us; in which we may observe,

### I. The danger of backsliding—

Open apostasy is confessedly a certain road to destruction: but we may also perish by indulging the more specious and equally dangerous habit of secret declension. Not that every variation in our frame constitutes us backsliders in heart; (for who then could be saved?)

but,

We come under this description,

#### 1. When we are habitually remiss in secret duties—

[It is possible we may once have run well, and enjoyed much blessedness in the service of our God; and yet have been so hindered in our course, as to have relapsed into a state of coldness and formality. The word, which was once precious, may have lost its savour; and prayer, which was once delightful, may have become an irksome task. Both public and private ordinances may have degenerated into an empty form, in which God is not enjoyed, nor is any blessing received. Where this is the case the person must surely be denominated a "backslider in heart."]

#### 2. When we habitually indulge any secret lusts—

[Whatever attainments a man may have made in religion, if his heart be not whole with God, he will sooner or later decline; and that which was his besetting sin in his state of ignorance, will regain its ascendancy, and (as far at least as relates to its inward workings) recover its dominion over him. He may still, for his profession sake, restrain sin, in a measure, as to its outward exercise, while yet its inward power is unsubdued. Was he naturally addicted to pride, envy, malice, covetousness, lewdness, or any other sin? If he allow it to return upon him after he has been once purged from it, if he be averse to have the evil of it pointed out to him, if he justify it, or cover his fault with excuses, instead of endeavouring earnestly to amend it, he certainly is a backslider in heart—]

In either of these states we are exposed to the most imminent danger—

[There are a variety of ways in which God will punish sin, but none so terrible as that specified in the words before us. If God were to fill the backslider with acute and long-continued pain, or visit him with some other temporal affliction, it might work for good, and bring him to consideration and repentance: but if he give him up to his own heart's lusts, and leave him to be "filled with his own ways," nothing but a certain and aggravated condemnation can ensue. Was he far from God? he will be further still: was he addicted to any sin? he will be more and more enslaved by it: nor can there be a doubt, but that God will give us up to this judgment, if we "leave off to behave ourselves wisely," and return to the indulgence of wilful neglects and secret sins—]

But we shall see a strong additional motive to persevere, if we consider,

### II. The benefit of maintaining steadfastness in religion—

The "good man" is here put in contrast with the backslider—

[As every occasional declension does not denominate a man a wilful backslider, so neither does every transient inclination to virtue denominate a man good. To be truly good, he must set out well, and "hold on his way," causing his "light to shine more and more unto the perfect dayd."]

Such an one shall find much satisfaction both in and from his way:

He shall have the comfort of seeing that he is advancing in religion—

[The testimony of a good conscience is one of the richest comforts we can enjoy. Hezekiah pleaded it before God in a dying hour, not indeed as a ground of justification before him, but as a ground whereon he might hope for some favourable indulgence with respect to the continuance of this present life. And Paul, in the near prospect of the eternal world, found it a source of unutterable joy. Now this satisfaction every upright soul shall enjoy. If he cannot distinctly see the progressive steps of his advancement from

day to day, he shall have a testimony in his own conscience that he is on the whole advancing: he shall feel himself more and more fixed in his “purpose to cleave unto the Lord,” and increasingly desirous of approving himself faithful to his God and Saviour.]

He shall also enjoy more abundant manifestations of God’s love—

[God will not leave his people without witness that he is pleased with their endeavours to serve and honour him. “He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” If he behold any persons striving to please him, “he will love them and come unto them, and sup with them, and manifest himself to them as he does not unto the worldh:” and the more diligent he sees them in doing his will, the more richly will he impart to them the tokens of his love, and the more abundantly communicate to them the blessings of grace and peacei.]

His prospects, moreover, of the eternal world shall be more bright and glorious—

[To many does God vouchsafe, as to Moses from Mount Pisgah, delightful prospects of the heavenly Canaan. He draws aside the veil, and suffers them to enter into the holy of holies, that they may behold his glory, and receive a foretaste of the blessedness which they shall one day enjoy in his presence. But on whom are these special favours bestowed? on the slothful, the careless, the inconstant? No. It is “the faithful man that shall abound with these blessings;” it is “him that rejoiceth in working righteousness, that the Lord will meet” in this intimate and endearing mannerk.]

INFER—

1. How much more ready is God to shew mercy than to execute his judgments!

[Had God been extreme to mark what is done amiss, who is there amongst us, whom he would not often have abandoned in an hour of secret declension? But he is full of compassion; and “judgment is his strange work,” to which he is greatly averse. At this very moment does he follow the backslider with the most earnest invitations, and most gracious promises, saying, “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freelyl.” Let us thankfully acknowledge his long-suffering and forbearance; and seek that happiness in the service of our God, which we shall in vain look for in any deviations from the path of duty.]

2. What need have we to watch over our own hearts!

[We are bidden to “keep our hearts with all diligence, because out of them are the issues of life and deathm:” and indeed we have need to guard them well, because they are so “bent to backslide from God.” It will be rarely, if ever, found, that the watchful Christian is left to fall into any gross sin. Men decline from God in secret, before he withdraws from them his restraining grace: they have chosen some evil “way of their own,” and deliberately followed it in their hearts, before God leaves them to be “filled with it.” If then we would not be swept away with a deluge of iniquity, let us be careful to stop the breach at first; for, if left a little time, it will widen, till it defies our utmost exertions. The present satisfaction, as well as the future salvation, of our souls depends on a stead-fast walk with God. Let us then “hold fast the profession of our faith, and the practice of our duty, without wavering:” and “let us look to ourselves that we lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full rewardn.”]

## Backsliding Topical List

- Is turning from God. 1 Kin 11:9.
- Is leaving the first love. Rev 2:4.
- Is departing from the simplicity of the gospel. 2 Cor 11:3; Gal 3:1–3; 5:4,7.
- God is displeased at. Ps 78:57,59.
- Warnings against. Ps 85:8; 1 Cor 10:12.
- Guilt and consequences of. Nu 14:43; Ps 125:5; Is 59:2,9-11; Jer 5:6; 8:5,13; 15:6; Lk 9:62.
- Brings its own punishment. Prov 14:14; Jer 2:19.
- A haughty spirit leads to. Prov 16:18.
- Proneness to. Prov 24:16; Hos 11:7.
- Liable to continue and increase. Jer 8:5; 14:7.
- Exhortations to return from. 2 Chr 30:6; Is 31:6; Jer 3:12,14,22; Hos 6:1.
- Pray to be restored from. Ps 80:3; 85:4; Lam 5:21.
- Punishment of tempting others to the sin of. Prov 28:10; Matt 18:6.
- Not hopeless. Ps 37:24; Prov 24:16.
- Endeavour to bring back those guilty of. Gal 6:1; James 5:19,20.
- Sin of, to be confessed. Is 59:12–14; Jer 3:13,14; 14:7–9.
- Pardon of, promised. 2 Chr 7:14; Jer 3:12; 31:20; 36:3.
- Healing of, promised. Jer 3:22; Hos 14:4.
- Afflictions sent to heal. Hos 5:15.



- Blessedness of those who keep from. Prov 28:14; Is 26:3,4; Col 1:21–23.
- Hateful to saints. Ps 101:3.
- Exemplified
- Israel. Ex 32:8; Neh 9:26; Jer 3:11; Hos 4:16.
- Saul. 1 Sam 15:11.
- Solomon. 1 Kin 11:3,4.
- Peter. Matt 26:70–74.
- ([Backsliding - Torrey's Topical Textbook](#))

**Nave's Topical** ([Backsliders](#)) has these instances of backsliding...

- Saul 1 Samuel 15:11,26-28
- Solomon 1 Kings 11:4-40; Nehemiah 13:26
- Amon 2 Kings 21:22,23
- Rehoboam 2 Chronicles 12:1,2
- Asa 2 Chronicles 16:7-9
- Joash 2 Chronicles 24:24
- Amaziah 2 Chronicles 25:27
- Syrians Isaiah 17:10,11
- Jonah Jonah 1:3
- The disciples Matthew 26:56; John 6:66
- Peter Matthew 26:69-75
- Corinthian Christians 1 Corinthians 5:1-8; 2 Corinthians 12:20,21
- Galatians Galatians 1:6; 3:1; 4:9-11; 5:6,7
- Hymenaeus and Alexander 1 Timothy 1:19,20
- Phygellus and Hermogenes 2 Timothy 1:15
- Demas 2 Timothy 4:10
- Churches of Asia 1 Timothy 5:15; Revelation 2:4,14,15,20; 3:2,3,15-18

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## GENESIS 19:26

But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar Of salt

The cause and danger of backsliding

### I. THE CAUSE OF BACKSLIDING.

#### Unbelief, leading to...

(1) disobedience,

(2) indecision. She was perplexed between God and the world.

### II. THE DANGER OF BACKSLIDING.

1. There is the danger of forfeiting our salvation.

2. The danger of punishment. (T. H. Leale.)

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**Havner** also said...

Taking it easy is often the prelude to backsliding. Comfort precedes collapse.

We are so *subnormal* that if we ever became *normal* people would think we were *abnormal*.

The Puritan writer **William Gurnall** rightly said that...

A *declining* Christian must needs be a *doubting* Christian

**F B Meyer** in a devotional on Psalm 1 alludes to **backsliding**, writing that...

THE BLESSED, or Happy, man is described negatively (Ps 1:1). There is a gradation in the attitude, the sphere of influence, and the condition of his companions. In attitude, we may begin by *walking*, advance to *standing*, and end by *sitting*. If we would avoid the sitting, let us guard against walking or standing.

In the sphere of influence, the beginning of backsliding is when a man listens to counsel; he then drifts into the path trodden by sinners, and finally is hardened enough to sit where scornful talk surrounds him on every hand.

**The condition of evil companions.** We should be repelled if we were to be plunged suddenly into contact with the scornful, but our moral interests may not be specially outraged by the counsel of the wicked. Indeed, the advice which wicked men give sometimes resembles closely what our heart suggests and our taste prefers. It is so specious (having deceptive attraction or allure; having a false look of truth or genuineness), so apparently sensible and natural, that we are captivated by it. Only gradually do we slide from those who forget God to those who set His law at defiance or openly blaspheme Him. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk, May 11)

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From the **Valley of Vision** we read this prayer entitled "**Backsliding**"...

O Lord,

When the world's unbelievers reject thee,  
and are so forsaken by thee  
that thou callest them no more,  
it is to thine own thou dost turn,  
for in such seasons of general apostasy  
they in some measure backslide with the world.

O how free is thy grace

that reminds them of the danger that confronts them  
and urges them to persevere in adherence to thyself!

I bless thee that those who turn aside

may return to thee immediately,  
and be welcomed without anything  
to commend them,  
notwithstanding all their former backslidings.

I confess that this is suited to my case, for of late

I have found great want,  
and lack of apprehension of divine grace;  
I have been greatly distressed of soul  
because I did not suitably come to the fountain  
that purges away all sin;  
I have laboured too much for spiritual life,  
peace of conscience, progressive holiness,  
in my own strength.

I beg thee, show me the arm of all might;

Give me to believe  
that thou canst do for me more than I ask or think,  
and that, though I backslide, thy love will never let me go,  
but will draw me back to thee with everlasting cords;  
that thou dost provide grace in the wilderness,  
and canst bring me out, leaning on the arm of my Beloved;

that thou canst cause me to walk with him  
by the rivers of waters in a straight way,  
wherein I shall not stumble.

Keep me solemn, devout, faithful, resting

on free grace for assistance, acceptance,  
and peace of conscience.

## BEGINNING OF BACKSLIDING... TURNING YOUR EYES FROM JESUS

**G Campbell Morgan** has a sermon entitled "**Backsliding**" on Deut 4:29 which is a must read somber, sobering reminder for in each of our hearts, no matter how spiritual we are, there lurks a dangerous, deceptive temptation which makes us "prone to wander" as the hymn writer phrases it...

This book of Deuteronomy is a singularly beautiful one. It is not a history. Historically, it covers a period of a very few days, for in all probability these final discourses of Moses occupied only a brief time in delivery. The book is more than a code of laws. All it says had been said already by this selfsame man. It consists of the last messages of Moses to the people of his heart. It is prophecy in the deepest and fullest meaning of that great word. It is the forth telling of the word of God to listening men. It is a poem full of light and full of fire. Here again the words of law are uttered, but in reading one is conscious rather of the driving power of love's great reason than of the binding nature of law's requirement, not that the requirement of law is lowered in one single particular, but that love speaks with wooing winsomeness and tender constraint. It utters the same thunder, but always in the tone of infinite pity. One would be inclined to say that in Deuteronomy we hear the law from the lips of a man who after long years has found his way into intimate communion with the heart of God. It is the Evangel of law. In the pleading tones of the great leader of the people one discovers that the reason of law is love, and if I ever ventured to choose a motto from some uninspired writer to preface so great a book as that of Deuteronomy, I would write Browning's words:

I report as a man may of God's work,  
All's love but all's law.

Law is here, but it is the law of love. The text on which I have chosen to speak to you is a supreme illustration of the consciousness of Moses of the tenderness of the heart of God. He had been supposing the possibility of backsliding on the part of the listening people. In the light of subsequent history his words are seen to have been prophetic.

After describing in detail the process of backsliding until the issue of it is revealed, he suddenly breaks out into these words: "If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul."

My message tonight is to those who are conscious in their own lives of any measure of backsliding. To such persons as the Apostle would address in the words he used when writing to the churches of Galatia, "Ye were running well; who did hinder you?" to those persons to whom Jesus is saying tonight, through the language he used to the Church at Ephesus, "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love"; to men and women who, looking back on their past days, remember the thrill and passion of discipleship as the supreme consciousness of life, but who now are sighing, "Where is the blessedness I had when first I found the Lord?" to men and women who are conscious of backsliding from their loyalty to Christ and relationship to God.

I beseech you to remember that the distance between yourself and your Lord matters nothing. The first cooling of passion is the tragedy. The final corruption is but a sequence to be expected, and which cannot be avoided save as the first love is restored.

I am speaking tonight to some who have traveled a long distance from the Father's house, to some who seem as though they had lost track of the way that leads them home; or I may be speaking to many others who have just lost their first love, who are maintaining all the externalities of Christian relationship, but have lost the

thrill, the fire, the passion, the devotion. Whether to those or to others upon the trackless burning desert of degradation my message is exactly the same...

The first is purely personal, perhaps hidden from men, corruption of self. The second is the sequel to self-corruption, the making of a graven image. Finally, the overt act of evil.

**(STEP #1) What is self-corruption?** It is the devotion of the life to something lower than the highest.

The first movement of backsliding may be accomplished without committing any sin which the age names vulgar. In the moment in which a man takes his eye from the highest and sets it upon something lower, be the distance apparently never so small, he has set himself upon the decline which ends in the desert and in the agony of rejection.

Self-corruption is the first step in the backslider's pathway, the choice of something lower than the highest. What is the highest? The thing you have seen that is highest. That is the highest for you. To you it was the fair and radiant vision of the **loveliness of the Christ** in those days when you knew He was fairer than all the sons of men, more perfect in loveliness. You saw that, and you turned your eyes from it to something a little lower, to some ideal you built for yourself out of your own imagining. You corrupted yourself when you allowed the false ideal to intrude into the realm of your own thinking, your own desire, your own choosing. That was the beginning of the whole story.

**(STEP #2) Following that is what always follows, the setting up of a graven image**

You say,

"Here your message breaks down. I have set up no graven image."

Remember, the graven image is always the figure of that which lies behind it. When a man has corrupted himself, **the issue is always that he thinks falsely of God** Man is so linked to deity in the very essential of his being that he will form his conception of God upon what he is in himself. There is a sense in which, try as he will, he cannot escape this. He is forevermore projecting his own personality into immensity, and calling that God. That is the whole history of idolatry through all the centuries. Man has flung the lines of his own personality into immensity, and called the result God. In proportion as his own personality has become corrupt and evil, he has projected corruption and evil into immensity, and made that his god.

**When a man corrupts himself,  
he corrupts the idea of God  
by putting something false in the place of God.**

In the old days it was a graven image, so that, as the prophet said, man took to himself a tree or a piece of stone, and carved out of it a semblance, a grotesque imitation of himself, and called it a god. So when a man has corrupted himself by accepting some ideal lower than the highest he immediately makes a god after the pattern of his own ideal, and descends a little lower on this course of backsliding, until swiftly and surely he descends to a course of evil which a little while ago he would have declared to have been impossible to himself.

**(STEP #3) He does the evil thing who never intended to do it.** He started by choosing the lower ideal. He proceeded, in the next place, to corrupt deity, by projecting into immensity the false lines of his own corrupt nature, and worshipping that. Suddenly the light that seemed to lure him fades, and the very ideal which he worshiped fails, and he finds himself doing things he never dreamed he could do.

I am trying, as God shall help me, to set the story of your backsliding in relationship to the spiritual and infinite. Shall I put that story in slightly different language? You corrupted yourself in that hour when you ceased your devotion to the God of your mother, and ceased to hand over your life wholly and absolutely to Christ. Your backsliding proceeded when you put into the place of Christ something else. It may have been your business. It may have been your very passion for knowledge. It may have been a far more mean and paltry thing than either of these, your pursuit of pleasure. You put something where Christ used to be. You who once took of your talents, and time, and strength, and poured them out in sacrificial service in the cause of Christ have been worshipping with all the soul, with all the heart, and with all the mind, wealth, fame, pleasure, I know not what. You know. There is your graven image. The result has been that this week, in the prosecution of your business, in the pursuit of your pleasure, you have done things which, if you thought I could proclaim them in your name from this pulpit, would cause you to blush and hurry from the building. You did not begin here. You began with the lowered ideal. You continued with the false deity, and the hour has come in which your hands in

the sanctuary are unclean with deeds of evil, and you know your very heart has become polluted. That is the process of backsliding.

I pray you mark the issue of backsliding as Moses describes it here: "I call heaven and earth to witness... ye shall soon perish utterly from off the land." That is the first thing. "The Lord shall scatter you among the peoples, and ye shall be left few in number among the nations, whither the Lord shall lead you away." It follows, finally, that "ye shall serve gods... wood and stone." I think there is a sacred, and holy, and tender, and burning satire in those words of Moses. "You," he says, "men of highest vision and noblest passion and fair ideals, men who have seen, but have turned your back upon the vision, you shall serve gods of wood and stone, which see not, hear not, smell not, eat not." That is the issue of backsliding. First, lack of possession. In the case of these people, possession of the land; in your case, possession of everything which you ought to possess. The man who turns his back upon Jesus Christ to possess anything inevitably loses it. Take one of the most burning and tragic illustrations in the whole of history, that of Judas. Judas let Jesus Christ go for thirty pieces of silver. Did you ever notice that he never spent one of them? Presently I see him hurrying back to the men who had bargained with him, and in a great intensity of agony I hear him say, "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood." And the cruel mockery of hell is here in the answer of the men who say, "What is that to us? See thou to it," as though they had said, "You made your bargain, abide by it." And he flung down the thirty pieces of silver. They bought with them the potter's field. He never spent one of them. You turn your back upon the God of the land, and you lose the land when you lose the God of the land. You turn your back upon the God Who made you and put you with all the capacities of your personality into this world, and you lose the world into which He put you. I know that is a thing which can be said only by experimental knowledge. I pray that God's Holy Spirit may carry conviction to some man here tonight. You cannot see the flowers if your back is toward God. You can botanize, but you cannot see the flowers. The man who has turned his back upon God has lost his land. He may own it under the laws of his country. He may even shoot over it for two weeks in the year, but he has lost it. The man who has turned his back upon the highest ideal has lost every real thing that comes within his reach. There will be many a weary march, many a hot and eager rush over the desert to reach the blossom, the bloom, and the fruit, but when the hand touches it, it is an apple of Sodom. The man who turns his back upon God loses also his influence and his power. May I say a thing that may sound strange and startling, and ask you to think of it. I can imagine that a man who has never been a Christian can exert some kind of pure moral influence upon his fellow men, but the man who has been a Christian and has turned his back upon God cannot do it any longer. The world holds in supreme contempt the man who has turned his back on Jesus. You have cut the nerve of your influence, backsliding soul. You have become lonely and scattered, without power to help in the world, because you have turned your back upon your God. There is nothing more tragic in the whole wide world than the man who once ran well but has been hindered, and has gone back to the weak and beggarly elements of the world. Oh, the tragedy of it! Think of it. You serve the god you have made for yourself. Worship and service are linked. Service is the expression of worship. Worship is the method of service. There is no escape from this. You are serving your God. You turned your back upon the living God, and set up a god of wood or stone, a god of mist, of vapor, of your own imagination, a cloud that rose like smoke from the fires of your own evil doing. You serve it. The tragedy of this worship, of this false service, is here. Your god cannot see, cannot hear. It is an insensate deity. There is no answer from the thing you worship when you cry to it in the time of fear. There is no sympathy, no heart in idolatry. The god of wood or stone gives no answer to the agonized cry of man, and all the false deities of your rationalism never help you in the tragedy of your pain, never soothe or solace you in the agony of your loneliness. You serve a god that cannot see, cannot hear, cannot taste, cannot smell.

There is nothing so tragic in all London as the backsliding soul. Moreover, if that tragedy is more terrible in one place than another it is in the case of the man who is a backslider, and is attempting to go on with work for God. The backslider in the pulpit is the supreme agony and tragedy in human life. The backslider in the Sabbath school class, in office in the church, in the church membership, the man or woman who keeps up the external semblance when there is no fire burning upon the inner altar, who compels himself or herself to the deadly drudgery of worship when there is no voice of the Spirit in the soul—that man is more to be pitied than the man who has cut himself adrift from the church and gone out into the darkness. There is far more agony in the heart backsliding that lacks the courage to be out and open than in the heart of the backslider that passes outside. I sometimes am afraid that our churches today are crowded with backsliders. I remember Thomas Cook saying to me years ago, "It is almost refreshing to have to go in the inquiry room with a man who has never professed belief on Jesus Christ before." Oh, the tragedy of the men and women who keep up the external semblance of Christianity with no virtue, no dynamic, no passion, no fire!



Is not this the story of backsliding? Did not the agony and tragedy begin when you took that ideal lower than the highest, when in your folly you made your own god because you thought the God of your childhood was unnecessary? Is it not true today that, like Samson of old in his agony, you grind for the amusement of mocking Philistines? The god you have made has no heart, no power, no pity.

My message tonight is to be found in these words, "If from thence." Mark this "if," and see the conditions. "If thou shalt seek." Seek what? "The Lord thy God." The search to which a man is called if he would return from the desert of his backsliding agony is not geographical; it is not circumstantial. He is not called upon to search for lost conditions. Moses did not say, "If you will seek with all your heart the land you have lost you shall find it." That would be a hopeless thing. He did not say, "If you will seek to set up again for yourselves the conditions from which you have departed you will be able to do it." That would not be true in human experience. What, then, is man to seek for? The Lord. Seek for your God. Get back to the conditions by getting back to God. If you are at a distance from Him tonight, at a distance from the light and song and glory of bygone days, do not attempt to regain the light and the song and the glory. Do not waste your time dealing with effects which you cannot correct; deal with the cause. Seek the Lord your God. It was when you turned your back upon Him that you lost your land. It was when you turned your back upon Him that you lost your power. It was when you turned your back upon Him that you became the bond-slave of the things which have no heart, no tears, no pity, no sympathy. Therefore, turn not back to the land. Turn not back to the hope of new influence. Turn back to God. "If from thence," from the lonely and distant place of disappointed hope and agony of spirit. "If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God." How am I to seek? "If," says the servant of God, repeating his "if," and emphasizing its true meaning—"If thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." That is, into this search after God, which is to be the way of restoration, man is to put his whole heart and soul. The man who has wandered far away is promised that he will find God, but the conditions are that he shall gather himself up for the business of finding, that he shall put into this search both passion and principle. My brother, are you waiting until some emotion created in a service or a mission, or by some preaching, shall surge upon you? You will wait long and hopelessly, and wait in vain. When you have done with your playing God is to be found. When you have done with your emotional fooling—and I am not proposing to alter that phrase, I am not proposing to take back either the adjective or the noun—when you have done with your emotional fooling, and will put the fiber of your being into the business of seeking God, He will break upon you in light and glory, but never till then. I am not here tonight to tell you that, having wandered away from God, the pathway back home is flowery, easy, or simple. I am not here to tell you that you must be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease. If you are a man you would not thank me for lying to you, even in the name of hope. You must seek God with all your heart and all your soul.

Let us pass to the promise. "Thou shalt find Him." Hear me, and God help me to speak these last few words as I ought to speak them. He is as near to you as He was in the old bright days. It is you who have changed, not He. You turned your back upon Him. He never turned His back upon you. It has often been pointed out that the Scriptures never speak about God being reconciled to men, but always of men being reconciled to God, and the method of the statement is of absolute importance. The moment in which you with all your heart and soul set yourself to seek, you will find God close at hand.

What is this that Moses promises? "Thou shalt find Him!" To find Him is everything. As Philip said long ago, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Find God, and you have found all that your heart wants. You are crying, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him." You are quite right. If you can find Him there is nothing else. If you seek Him with all your heart and soul you will find Him. Find Him where? Just where you are. Will He come with flaming and flashing glory? In all probability, no. Will He come with some new sense of His coming, making you thrill in every fiber of your being? In all probability, no. It is far more likely that He will come with a still small voice. But you will find Him if you seek Him. To find Him is to find all that has been lost by the process of backsliding. Backsliding began with the corruption of self. The finding of God is the redemption of self. I find myself when I lose myself. There was infinite meaning in the word of Jesus when He said, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life... shall find it." It is in that moment when I set myself to seek God as the first matter in my life, when I crucify myself with my affection and my desire, and will no longer ask whether this thing is for my pleasing, but will give myself to seeking God, that I find Him. To the man who finds the true God, God is enough. Dagon falls to be broken in pieces. The lost ideal and the lost joys are found. Instead of outward and external act of evil, the outward and external act of good becomes the habit of the life, but never until God is found.

The issues are changed. If you will find God you will find the flowers and the land, and the possibilities of your own being. All the gray sky will flash with the purple of morning if you will but find God. To find God is to find

everything. Instead of serving insensate deities you will reign in life in fellowship with the living and eternal God.

Let me lay my final emphasis upon these words. "From thence." Are you away from God? And, of course, I take it for granted that every Christian in this house who is not away from God is in sympathy with me, and is praying for the man who is away from God. Are you away, just at the beginning of the backsliding process? Have you within the last few weeks or months turned your eyes from the highest to something a little lower, or are you far away from Him tonight, almost in despair? I want to crave the patience of this whole congregation while I speak to one man. I mean that very really. I do not know where he sits, but here is his letter. I do not know his name, and I do not ask to know it. I am perfectly willing to respect his expressed desire that I will not try to find him. Let me say to this man that this sermon was prepared before I got his letter. I say this for his comfort, for if ever God sent a message to one man by a messenger who did not know the man, it is so in this case. I am going to respect this man's confidence by not reading all his letter, but I am going to read a sentence or two, and I am sure he will let me do it, because, as he says in his closing words, there may be numbers here tonight like him. He is a young man, and tells me that he came to London thinking that religion was a prop for weak people, having his own ideal, which he attempted to follow. Then he tells the story of the loss of the land, the story of the loss of influence and power, the story of actual sin. Then he tells me how, not knowing why, he wandered into this building last Sunday morning, and heard me read about the risen Jesus, and he tells me how, in the light of that vision of Christ, he was conscious of his own degradation. Then he says: "I crept home, broken down, broken-hearted. This is my tale. Surrounded by people yet utterly alone. There is no one to whom I can go, though my heart is aching and my mind is sick. Can you give me one word of sympathy, one word of hope, or, better still, one word of guidance? I shall be present at your service tomorrow night and all I ask is that you will say something which I can recognize and seize upon for myself. I do not want to be sought out in any way. Let me remain, as probably I am, the type of scores of unhappy men similarly situated." Can I give you one word of hope, my brother? Yes. If I could not, I would never preach again. What is my word of hope to you? This is it. "If from thence." God gave it to me before He gave me your letter. He knew you were going to write that letter. He led you here last Sunday morning, and brought you face to face with your lost Lord. He gave me that message for you: "If from thence." Just where you are tonight. How I know what it means, alone in the crowd! "If from thence ye shall seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." "Oh that I knew where I might find Him." Are you saying that?

Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit can meet—Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

Man, I am your fellow man, a sinner like yourself. I cannot show you these things. See the vision of my text. Never mind my sermon. Seek Him, seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. Trample your pride beneath your feet. Crucify your prejudice. Put the whole business of your life into this minute. Trust Him, and for you also, or I could never preach again if it were not true, the day will break, and "He will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." He will restore to you the land. He will put about you the arms of His love, and lift upon you the light of His face, and make you His own. But you must seek Him with all your heart and with all your strength. My brother, I will not attempt to drag you from your place of hiding until you want to come, but though my hand never rest in yours and my eye never look into yours, right there the Christ Whose purity your sin has insulted is waiting to take you back to His heart. Let Him do it. May God bless and help you.

## The Way to God Dwight L Moody...

Moody devotes an entire chapter of his book **The Way to God** to backsliding...

THERE ARE TWO KINDS of backsliders. Some have never been converted: they have gone through the form of joining a Christian community and claim to be backsliders; but they never have, if I may use the expression, "**slid forward**." They may talk of backsliding; but they have never really been born again. They need to be treated differently to real backsliders,- those who have been born of the incorruptible seed, but who have turned aside. We want to bring the latter back the same road by which they left their first love.

There is nothing that will do backsliders so much good as to take them to the Word of God; and for them the

Old Testament is as full of help as the New. The book of Jeremiah has some wonderful passages for wanderers. What we want to do is to get backsliders to hear what God the Lord will say.

Look for a moment at Jeremiah 6:10.

"To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken, behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it."

That is the condition of backsliders. **They have no delight whatever in the word of God.** But we want to bring them back, and let God get their ear. Read from the fourteenth verse to the seventeenth:

"They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein; and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken." (Jer 6:14-17)

That was the condition of the Jews when they had backslidden. They had turned away from the old paths. And that is the condition of backsliders. They have got away from the good old book. Adam and Eve fell by not hearkening to the word of God. They did not believe God's word; but they believed the Tempter. **That is the way backsliders fall- by turning away from the word of God...**

**Now there is one thing to which we wish to call the attention of backsliders; and that is,- that the Lord never forsook them; but that they forsook Him!** The Lord never left them; but they left Him! And this too without any cause! He says: "What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me?" Is not God the same today as when you came to Him first? Has God changed? Men are apt to think that God has changed; but the fault is with them.

Backslider, I would ask you, "What iniquity is there in God, that you have left Him and gone far from Him?" You have, He says, hewed out to yourselves broken cisterns that hold no water. The world cannot satisfy the new creature. No earthly well can satisfy the soul that has become a partaker of the heavenly nature. Honor, wealth, and the pleasures of this world, will not satisfy those who, having tasted the water of life, have gone astray, seeking refreshment at the world's fountains. Earthly wells will get dry. They cannot quench spiritual thirst.

Again in the Jer 2:32 verse:

"Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet My people have forgotten Me, days without number." That is the charge which God brings against the backslider. They "have forgotten Me, days without number."

I have often startled young ladies when I have said to them, "My friend, you think more of your earrings than of the Lord." The reply has been, "No, I do not." But when I have asked, "Would you not be troubled if you lost one; and would you not set about seeking for it?" the answer has been, "Well, yes, I think I should." But though they had turned from the Lord, it did not give them any trouble; nor did they seek after Him that they might find Him.

How many once in fellowship and in daily communion with the Lord now think more of their dresses and ornaments than of their precious souls! Love does not like to be forgotten. Mothers would have broken hearts if their children left them and never wrote a word or sent any memento of their affection: and God pleads over backsliders as a parent over loved ones who have gone astray; and He tries to woo them back. He asks: "What have I done that they should have forsaken Me?"

The most tender and loving words to be found in the whole of the Bible are from Jehovah to those who have left Him without a cause. Hear how He argues with such:

"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts" (Jeremiah 2:19).

I do not exaggerate when I say that I have seen hundreds of backsliders come back; and I have asked them if they have not found it an evil and a bitter thing to leave the Lord. You cannot find a real backslider, who has known the Lord, but will admit that it is an evil and a bitter thing to turn away from Him. I do not know of any

one verse more used to bring back wanderers than that very one. May it bring you back if you have wandered into the far country. ([Read All of Chapter 9 in Moody's book - THE WAY TO GOD And How to Find It](#))

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**William Jenkyn** warned that...

God will preserve you in your ways, not in your wanderings.

**F B Meyer** in a devotional discusses the causes of backsliding, noting that...

THE CAUSES of backsliding are many. We have pretended to be living a more devoted life than was actually the case; we neglected to watch unto prayer; we allowed secret sin to eat out the heart of our piety, 'as the white ant works destruction in the East; or we yielded to temptation, and then sought to justify ourselves against the remonstrances (earnest presentations of reasons for opposition or grievance) of conscience; or we yielded to the fear of man, and drifted with the multitude to do evil; or we became prosperous, and trusted only in our wealth; or poor, and succumbed to covetousness and the bitterness of despair. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk. October 6)

### **Are You Leaning the Wrong Direction?**

Several years ago a severe ice storm hit southern lower Michigan, causing great damage to trees. As I surveyed the destruction, I checked the two large white birches in my backyard. One had lost some of its limbs, but its partner had suffered a worse fate. The entire tree had toppled over and was completely uprooted. Why the one and not the other? The answer was simple. Instead of standing straight up, this thirty-five-foot tree had grown at a pronounced angle. So when the heavy ice accumulated on its branches, it fell in the direction it was leaning.

Samson was leaning in the wrong direction. As a result, he had a great downfall. Although he is numbered among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 and was one of Israel's great judges, a sad note is sounded throughout the story of his life due to a serious weakness in his character. He had an eye for women, and he insisted on taking a wife from a heathen nation (Judges 14:3). His down-fall came because his life was inclined toward fulfilling the lusts of the flesh.

If we don't live in fellowship with the Lord each day, our lives will lean toward some weakness or besetting sin. Then, when a crisis comes or if we are caught off guard, we will be unable to resist the pressure. Samson's fall is a tragic example of what can happen to a leaning Christian. —D J De Haan ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**F B Meyer** has a pithy comment writing that...

If we desire to be pure and good, Christ-like and God like, we must live in fellowship with Christ; beholding and reflecting His glory, even the lowliest and most sinful may become changed into His image. How different to Moses is the unveiled glory of Christ. Let us beware of anything that might bring a veil between Him and us, and nothing will so soon do this as sin, and inconsistency. Moses wist not that his face shone, and Samson wist not that the Lord had departed from him (Jdg16:20). There is a tragic as well as a blessed unconsciousness. Let us see to it that we watch and pray, that we may not be taken unawares, and deprived of our purity and strength whilst wrapt in unconsciousness. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

**Michael Bentley** has some insights on backsliding from the Life of David...

When someone is in a **backsliding condition** the **law of God and the word of God no longer have the importance and the authority that they once had**. In chapter 21:1 we see David at Nob, the place to which the tabernacle had been removed. There, David seems not to have batted an eyelid when he told a blatant lie to Ahimelech the priest. How was it that such a godly man as David could so easily break one of God's laws? The answer is clearly because he was in a **backsliding condition**. No doubt, David could justify his actions. He would probably have said something like, 'I had to twist the truth a little because the king was after me.' We all try to rationalize our disobedience by thinking that the Bible does not apply in our particular case. But if we reason like that, as David obviously did at that time, then we are on very dangerous ground...

When a person is in a backsliding condition he **does not desire spiritual sustenance** (that is only a routine formality for him); he desires material benefits. We all ought to ask ourselves this, 'When I go to church what am I really looking for?' Do we go there in order to be eager to seek the Lord and wait before him to hear his voice so that we might obey it? Or do we just go to have a good time, and be 'blessed-up'? If it is the latter,

then that is materialistic and selfish, and we ought to examine our hearts and consciences to see if we are backsliding from the faith...

When our hearts are in a backsliding condition then **we find the people of the world much more attractive than the people of God**. We would much rather enjoy the pleasures of this life than the blessings of God's kingdom. We may find the atmosphere of the pub more to our liking than the company of God's worshipping people...

When we are backsliding **often innocent people end up suffering because of our selfishness**. The children of a backsliding father are deprived of a good Christian example in the home. The congregation of a backsliding pastor are robbed of spiritual leadership in the church; and the employees of a backsliding boss do not receive the godly care that they ought to have.

Backsliding ought not to be a believer's normal state. If you are conscious that you are a backslider, then take heart from what we are going to consider. There is 'a way back to God, from the dark paths of sin'. One day things started to improve physically, emotionally and spiritually for David. That was when he went to the cave of Adullam (1Sa 22:1). Things got better then because he went back to Israel, the land of God's people. When he returned to the land, 'his brothers and his father's household heard about it. They went down to him there' (1Sa 22:1). It is the same when any backslider returns to the Lord; he automatically wants to start meeting with God's people again. Psalm 34 expressed David's joy at being back in a strong spiritual state. He no longer told lies. He said, 'Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies (Psalm 34:11-13). He experiences the Lord's protection. (Psalm 34:17-22). Furthermore, he knows the blessing of being with God's people. (Psalm 142:5-7). (Ibid)

## The Backsliding Heart, Etc. - Joseph Parker

Proverbs 14:14-34

Backsliding takes place in the heart, and not in the foot. It is in the foot indeed that we show it, but the collapse took place in the spirit before the foot began to falter, and to recede, and to fall. The issue is that the backslider shall be filled with the fruit which he has coveted; he shall drink deeply of the draught which he has mingled: he shall be allowed to see how fully he has succeeded in making a failure of life. He shall be mocked and taunted by the spirit of judgment, so that when he takes up his idol of success, he shall find it to be an image of utterest disappointment; his harvests shall rot in his hands; if he pull down his barns and build greater that he may store his goods, he will find that when he has completed his barns his goods are nowhere to be found. There is no substance in sin, no real treasure, no solid enjoyment, nothing that abides with the consent of benediction and the security of a broad and generous defence. Sin gives what little it has in the way of joy at once, and at the end it is nothing but ruin. On the other hand, "a good man shall be satisfied from himself:" it has often been observed that he is not to be satisfied with himself, but from himself, from the treasure that is within him, from the thoughts which he has accumulated, from remembered prayers, from recollected promises, from all the retrospect of discipline and progress he shall draw comfort continually. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The word of God becomes part of the very man who treasures it and studies it; it is impossible to distinguish between him and the word on which he lives, for the word has entered into the very fibre of his soul, and to take it away, were the extraction possible, would be to leave the man without faith, and hope, and joy. Here is the difference between badness and goodness; badness fails; after making desperate efforts to cheer and to gladden, it sinks into the deepest melancholy; whereas goodness grows, extends, ripens, becomes more and more by daily use, and at the end is a greater blessing than it was at the beginning. The good man can bear to look back upon life; he knows its failure; he owns the sins which he has committed against God; yet knowing that his supreme purpose has been to please the Almighty and to walk in the ways of Jesus Christ, he feels a blessing descending upon him, whilst he causes to pass before his eyes all the goodness and mercy of God. Take from a good man his money, his health, his society, yea, his very books, from which he has drawn innumerable thoughts stimulating and ennobling, yet his memory abides, a treasure-house well filled, an inspiration renewed from above day by day, as necessity increases in the urgency of its claims. Goodness shall stand when all things fail. A good man need not be a learned man, a pedantic man, a man full of intellectual ideas, speculations, and romances; he is to be meek, simple, genuine, real in every thought, unselfish in every desire; and when a man sets his life by the grace of God in this direction he will enjoy such satisfaction as God only can cause him to realise.

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William Arnot in his excellent commentary on Proverbs writes...

**"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways."**

Proverbs 14:14.

**IF the secret history of backsliders were written, many startling discoveries would be made.** Whatever the enormity it may end in, **backsliding begins unseen in the heart.** The Christian in name, whose fall resounds through the land, filling the mouths of scorers with laughter, and suffusing the faces of disciples with shame, did not descend to that depth by one leap from the high place on which he formerly stood. He does not by a sudden resolution of mind turn from virtue into vice. He does not even abandon his Sabbath school, or desert the prayer-meeting, by a deliberate judgment.

A slipping begins secretly and imperceptibly in his heart,  
while appearances on the surface are kept unchanged.

He ceases to watch and pray. He admits vain thoughts, and gives them encouragement to lodge within him. Having no hunger for righteousness, he neglects the bread of life. He grows weary of religious exercises and religious society. If he continue to attend them, it is a bodily service, endured for the purpose of maintaining the place which he has attained. Duties become more irksome, and forbidden indulgence more sweet.

There is a weighing beam exposed to public view, with one scale loaded and resting on the ground, while the other dangles high and empty in the air. Everybody is familiar with the object, and its aspect. One day the curiosity of the passengers is arrested by observing that the low and loaded beam is swinging aloft, while the side which hung empty and light has sunk to the ground. Speculation is set on edge by the phenomenon, and set at rest again by the discovery of its cause. For many days certain diminutive but busy insects had, for some object of their own, been transferring the material from the full to the empty scale. Day by day the sides approached an equilibrium, but no change took place in their position. At last a grain more removed from one side, and laid in the other, reversed the preponderance, and produced the change. There is a similar balancing of good and evil in a human heart ; the sudden outward change results from a gradual inward preparation.

All engineering proceeds upon the principle of reaching great heights or depths by almost imperceptible inclines. The adversary of men works by this wile. When you see a man who was once counted a Christian standing shameless on a mountain-top of open impiety, or lying in the miry pit of vice, you may safely assume that he has long been worming his way in secret on the spiral slimy track by which the old serpent marks and smoothes the way to death.

On the same branch of an apricot-tree that leant against the south side of a garden wall, I have seen two fruits, large and luscious, hanging side by side, and ripening apace in the sun. They were of equal size and equal loveliness. Their stainless bosoms peeped from beneath the leaves, to bask in the noonday heat. Nothing in nature could be more lovely to look upon, or more rich in promise. Yet, ere to-morrow's sun is hot, one of them grows black on the side, and bursts, and collapses, and becomes a mass of rottenness, while the other remains in undiminished beauty and fragrance by its side. Whence the diverse fates of these twin beauties ! Especially, why did the catastrophe happen so suddenly ? It happened thus :—yesterday, when you stood looking on the two, admiring their equal beauty, one of them was hollow in the heart. If then you had taken it in your hand, and turned it round, you would have seen corruption already pervading its mass. On the dark side, next the wall, it has been pierced and entered. Its inside has been scooped out and devoured, while it continued to present to the passenger as fair an appearance as ever ; and see, black, crawling, loathsome creatures are nestling and reveling in that hollow heart, beneath that beautiful skin.

Thus are fair promises in the garden of the Lord suddenly blighted. You have known two standing long side by side in a goodly profession, and laboring hand in hand for the kingdom of Christ. One of them falls headlong into a pit of vice, and next day the whole neighborhood rings with the scandal. Diverse are the emotions, but all are moved. Christ's enemies sneer, and his members sigh. How sudden the fall has been, sorrowing disciples say to each other in a suppressed whisper, when they meet,—how sudden and unexpected ! No, friends ; it was not a sudden fall. In the heart, unseen, there has been a long preparation of backsliding. Vain thoughts have lodged within, and vile thoughts have been welcome visitors. Persons first vain and then vile have by degrees found their way into his presence, and charmed him, so that he cannot want them, though he knows they are stinging serpents. By such a process his heart has been hollowed out, and inhabited by creatures more loathsome than crawling vermin, while the skin of profession was kept whole, and its fairest side turned to public view. A cry of wonder rises from the crowd, when the hollow shell falls in, because they did not know its hollowness until the fall revealed it.

There is a warning, in such a case :—beware of backsliding in heart ; small beginnings may issue in a fearful end. But there is encouragement even here to disciples who are humble, and trustful, and watchful. There is no such thing as a sudden collapse of a sound heart. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."  
([LXXIV. THE BACKSLIDER](#) )

## THE PROCESS OF BACKSLIDING

### A W Tozer

(From "[The Dangers of a Shallow Faith](#)" - listen also an [audio excerpt](#)) ([Other audios by Tozer](#))

- The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself. Proverbs 14:14

The backsliding Christian is one of the most serious threats to plague the evangelical church today. If the Church is to complete the job of world evangelization before the return of Christ, we need to deal with this serious problem.

The word "backsliding" came from the backward slide of Israel, reminiscent of a backsliding heifer. I have seen that happen as a lad on the farm, when an animal would start up a slippery bank, get partway up and then lose traction and slip back after many plunges and efforts to get up. Sometimes it could not get up at all. The man of God, with no intention of being facetious, said that Israel was like the animals he had seen try to climb up a slippery hill. They worked hard at it and pushed, and then they slid back as many steps as they had gone up.

#### The Fickle Heart

There are two main causes of backsliding. The first cause is the fickleness of the human heart. It would be a wonderful thing if we could remain what we were, but it would also be a most damning thing. How sad our state would be if we could not change. Our ability to change our mind is our hope.

The call of God in repentance is a call to change from the worst state to a better state. If we could not go from one state to another, we would be morally static; we would be damned. Because it is possible to go from one moral state to another, we can go from bad to good and can get right with God. We can become good, though we were bad before; we can become holy, though we were unholy before. That same ability to go from one moral state to another and to change our mind can also cause us not to backslide.

The caution is that the only thing people stick to, as a rule, is something that nature forces them to do—eating, drinking, sleeping, self-protection or some other strong internal instinct. As long as the human race goes on, there will always be love, marriage and all that, because it is a deeply rooted instinct in human nature. But anything that requires planning and careful, painstaking labor is easy to turn away from.

People tend to follow what is easy and what goes the natural way. Outside of taxes and certain other duties forced upon us from the outside, either by nature or by law, we mostly do what we like to do or what is natural to us. That is fertile soil for backsliding. A person under some great pressure of bereavement or fear turns to God for a while, but the instinct to stay there is not in them. The instinct is to go the other way. It is irksome, this reading the Bible and praying. It turns into a painstaking thing, and so it eats away a little at a time until a person has gone backward.

If you took a poll of every man and woman who, under evangelistic pressure, made some step toward God, you would see that today they have forgotten all about Him. They are now living as if there were no God in heaven above. I tell you, it would be a shock you would not get over if you could see them all in some stadium, standing like statues, tier on tier. Though some made a step toward God, or even met God, it did not last, because serving Jesus Christ is contrary to the human nature. By nature, we do not persevere. The fickleness of the human heart turns a person away, and he backslides.

#### The Evil Heart

Then there is the inherent evil of the human heart that causes backsliding. The whole constitution of a human being is against being good. Remember two things here. If we are now what we originally were, made in the image of God, without sin, then it would be perfectly natural to serve God as the angels in heaven above and the seraphim beside the throne have no trouble serving God. Nothing in them pulls them away from God.

When made to serve God, a being is doing what is as natural to its nature as a duck when it goes to the water. A duck is following its nature; and the holy angels above follow their nature to serve God. If you and I were what we should be, unfallen and without the



taint and stain of sin, we would be able to serve God as the angels do, and it would come natural and flow out like a fountain from the pressure beneath. But we are fallen.

A man turns his face to do that which anciently he did in Adam and should be doing now; but sin has robbed him of the power. Sin made our nature. So when we pray, it is not natural. All of us have to accumulate the wages of sin, if we say, "Our Father, who art in Heaven." But if that sin had not come to override, we would simply raise our voices and, like the bird, we would sing God's praises without moving away from Him and cooling off.

Backsliding always begins with the heart. People blame other circumstances and say, "It's my home life. It's the place where I work. It's the school. It's because I was ill, or it was because I had to work too much. It's because I didn't have time." Those are external things; backsliding begins in the heart.

God knows before an individual knows when his heart is cooling off. After God, the individual finds it out. Then the church finds it out; and if he continues, the world finds it out. This is always the order. At the point when the world finds out a man or woman has backslidden and gone back on his faith, the church knew it before the world, and the individual knew it before the church; but God knew it before the man or woman found it out. Backsliding always begins in the human heart.

### **What Happens in the Backsliding Heart**

What is happening in the person with a backsliding heart? To begin with, he is losing interest in the things of God and gradually going back to the old ways or to more refined sins than the ones he used to do. He is losing interest toward God. His heart is not as hot as it was a few weeks or months or a year before, and his love toward God is cooling off.

Then, he is losing interest in communion with God. If you are not doing as well as you used to, the only kind and honest thing I can say is that you are a backslider in heart. If you loved to pray before, you will love to pray as much now. If you do not love to pray as much as before, at what other conclusion can you arrive?

If the doctor takes a blood count and finds the blood count way down, what can he do? Or if he runs other tests and finds that the man's health is in trouble, what honest thing can a doctor do? He's not going to pat him on the shoulder and say, "I'll meet you on the golf course Saturday. Everything will be all right." What a fool that doctor would be, and what a traitor to his profession. There is only one thing for him to do. He must state his findings and say, "Bud, you're not in as good a shape as you used to be. You ought to listen to me now." And then the doctor gives his patient suggestions for improving his health. The point is that the honest doctor will tell a patient if he runs tests and finds there is a problem with his health.

Backsliding is the losing of our individual communion with God. Read an old hymnbook and see how the writers loved to fellowship with God. Communion with God was sweet to them. We have so much these days that crowds our time for communion with God—so many things that distract us from being quiet before Him.

Backsliding resides in the heart, and these other things are only external aids to the devil. When a man is backslidden in heart, he tends to get a little bit bored. If a glowing, earnest Christian bores you a little; if when you are in a little group drinking coffee or soda, and it bores you a little or embarrasses you when somebody brings up the thought of God, you had better look to your own heart. Whenever talk of God and His Word and His work in the world bores us, be sure that we are wrong inside.

To be as honest and realistic as possible, I will say that some people are religious bores. They have a way of introducing religion into the most impossible situations and do it out of habit, without sincerity or any spontaneity whatsoever, but only because they have been trained to do it, like trained seals. They would bore an archangel. But if an honest, happy-hearted Christian turns and talks about God, and it bores you or embarrasses you, you are in the wrong company. If you are bored with spiritual conversation (I'm not talking about religious chitchat that would bore anybody), something has gone wrong inside of your heart. The best thing to do is admit it and acknowledge it before God.

Another symptom is the presence of a critical spirit toward other preachers. If he is not a Billy Graham, some people do not want to hear him. When a plain, good, honest man gets up, and with poor delivery and a few blunders tells them about God and the things of God, they will say, "Oh, he's all right." They will come in small numbers but with no zeal or enthusiasm unless it is an extraordinary preacher. I tell you, we could well afford to humble ourselves and listen to anyone that has something to say. I think we ought to pray, "God, give me a heart so sensitive that I'll get help from anyone." I'm not talking about getting help from hypocrites and pretenders; nobody can get help from them. I do not look to the devil for my help, but to any honest man of God.

We ought to be careful lest we become too professional and develop the tendency to criticize unkindly. If it is a question of trying to improve, that is another matter. If it is a question of trying to push the standards up—to get people to write, preach, pray, talk and exhort better, to help the new choir to raise its standards—that is another matter and is perfectly all right. But if it is just carping, I do not care to hear him. If the man writes or sings, and he is a sincere man, then he ought to warm my heart with his sincerity if I am not backslidden.

If all the people entering churches on a given Sunday are cooling off in their hearts or have cooled off and do not have in their hearts what their presence seems to show they have, many a pastor would spend the afternoon on his face, weeping between the porch and the altar, crying, "Oh, what have I done or haven't done, that my people are in such a condition?"

Solomon wrote, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself" (Prov. 14:14). It means the backslider will soon get enough of himself. How? He gets enough of himself when he attempts to pray and finds how heavy and embarrassed he is to be devout. He is asked to pray and he tries to be devout, but his heart has long ago broken fellowship. He is like an instrument ready to be plugged in where there is no power. He plugs in dutifully, but nothing happens. A man gets enough of that after a while, and enough of hollow testimonies. They are false and the words are dry. Yet he dare not stop talking, because he's got a reputation for being a good Christian.

Many people have a reputation for being good Christians in churches; then they secretly break with God and there is a lack of communion. The fires burn low and they hardly feel any sense of God at all; and yet they have to keep it up, so they may even allow themselves to get elected to boards and to young people's groups, to choirs and all the rest. I am afraid the whole thing is hopeless, because the heart has slipped away. When God finds our hearts slipping, and we will not admit it to ourselves in our secret moments, we have gotten to a place where, if we told the truth, we are bored with God and religion. We would not admit it—we would be ashamed to admit it—but there it is.

What do you think God thinks about us? Jesus, in the book of Revelation, said, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (2:4). He chided that church because He found it happening back in the second century. He chided them because they were losing their affection but would not admit it. Not an elder in the Ephesian church who stood to preach; not a deacon that ever passed the plates; not a member of the board would ever dare to get up and say, "I'm tired of God. I'm weary of this whole business." Jesus said, "I don't feel the warmth I used to feel. Your smile is not there; your breath is not so warm; the tone of your voice is not so affectionate. I miss it," He said. "You've left your first love." After a while, a man will get enough of that—of trying to keep up religious appearances with a hollow testimony and talk with enthusiastic Christians about God, and seeming to enjoy it.

Some are bored with constant church attendance. Somebody has told them: Don't send your children to Sunday School; get out of bed and take them. They determine they are going to follow that admonition, and it is good. I am glad they do, but it would be so much better if they enjoyed it. I have been forced to go to religious meetings that I did not want to attend. I knew there was nothing there for me; I could not contribute anything, but I had gone because circumstances compelled me. If I have to be doing something I do not like to do, I would get bored with that right early. That is evidence of something I do not like to think about.

Then, there is the matter of giving; God's warm-hearted people give spontaneously. They love it. They give joyously, because it is a pleasure to give.

If I were not a Christian, I would not tithe. All of those button pushers that come along and try to show that if you tithe you'll have more money than you did if you don't tithe; all of that low-grade effort to get people to give isn't Christian; it isn't spiritual; it isn't decent. What kind of person would you be if you brought your offerings to God's house knowing that if you did you would be more prosperous than if you did not? Knowing that you will have more than if you did not tithe? That's tithing to get more. What kind of person would you be?

When you have lost your joy, you will get tired of giving out of habit. The man will get enough of that after a while, and I pray the sooner the better, and keep cheerful. Keep spiritually cheerful and relax. In Galatians 6:1, Paul tells us, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one." The words used there are medical terms and mean that when an arm or shoulder gets out of joint, it gets snapped back in. I pray that God will do us the inestimable favor of going from heart to heart, mind to mind and soul to soul—that He will test us with His spiritual Geiger counter. And if there is a cooling off in there, He will find it and cure it.

Remember when Jesus looked upon Peter. Scripture says, "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61–62).

I do not know what Jesus said. He simply turned and looked at Peter. The woman said, "Are you one of His followers?" and Peter said, "No."

She said, "It's your accent."

He said, "I'm not."

She said again, "You are. Your speech betrays you."

Then he said, "I'm not a Christian. I am going to do something no Christian would do." So he cursed. His actions were saying that if he acted like a Christian, he might be arrested along with Jesus. So in order to prove that he was not a Christian, he was going to curse, and so he cursed.

She finally said, "Oh, well he's right. He is not a Christian."

Just before He died, Jesus turned and looked at that cursing apostle. Peter was not well educated, but he was a genius in his own right, and he looked up into that face, and what he saw in that face of hurt and pain and sorrow and longing and love was too much for Peter. He hurried out of the house and stood outside somewhere, and with his face in his hands, he wept bitterly. The Greek language indicates an uncontrolled torrent of weeping; yet Jesus never said a word. He just looked at Peter.

I wonder if the tender Jesus will not look at you—just look, that is all. How will you respond?

### **What Will You Do with Jesus?**

**A. B. Simpson (1843–1919)**

Jesus is standing in Pilate's hall,  
Friendless, forsaken, betrayed by all;  
Hearken! what meaneth the sudden call?  
What will you do with Jesus?

Jesus is standing on trial still,  
You can be false to Him if you will,  
You can be faithful through good or ill:  
What will you do with Jesus?

Will you evade him as Pilate tried?  
Or will you choose Him, whate'er betide?  
Vainly you struggle from Him to hide:  
What will you do with Jesus?

Will you, like Peter, your Lord deny?  
Or will you scorn from His foes to fly,  
Daring for Jesus to live or die?  
What will you do with Jesus?

"Jesus, I give Thee my heart today!  
Jesus, I'll follow Thee all the way,  
Gladly obeying Thee!" will you say:  
"This I will do with Jesus!"

What will you do with Jesus?  
Neutral you cannot be;  
Some day your heart will be asking,  
"What will He do with me?"

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### **Self-Acquaintance**

[William Cowper](#)

Dear Lord! accept a sinful heart,  
Which of itself complains,  
And mourns, with much and frequent smart,  
The evil it contains.

There fiery seeds of anger lurk,  
Which often hurt my frame;  
And wait but for the tempter's work,  
To fan them to a flame.

Legality holds out a bribe  
To purchase life from Thee;  
And Discontent would fain prescribe  
How Thou shalt deal with me.

While Unbelief withstands Thy grace,  
And puts the mercy by;  
Presumption, with a brow of brass,  
Says, "Give me, or I die!"

How eager are my thoughts to roam,  
In quest of what they love!  
But ah! when duty calls them home,  
How heavily they move!

Oh, cleanse me in a Saviour's blood,  
Transform me by Thy power,  
And make me Thy beloved abode,  
And let me roam no more.

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**CATERPILLARS TO BUTTERFLIES** - In a children's church service, a seminary student spoke on the Christian's walk. He presented his message in the first person, or more accurately expressed—"the first butterfly." His dramatic monologue incorporated the following guise: two large antennas with sensors attached to the ends, halved eggshells for his nose and eyes, a bright orange suit, and beautifully knitted wings. He proceeded to tell his story as a butterfly who was describing his former state and lifestyle as a caterpillar. Obviously, he could no longer live as a caterpillar, since his state had been drastically changed. The message was pointedly driven home. Just as he could no longer live as a caterpillar once he had become a butterfly, so we can no longer live as unbelievers once we have become believers.

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**BACKSLIDERS LOSE THE JOY OF THEIR SALVATION** - Robert Robinson, author of the hymn "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," lost the happy communion with the Savior he had once enjoyed, and in his declining years he wandered into the by-ways of sin. As a result, he became deeply troubled in spirit. Hoping to relieve his mind, he decided to travel. In the course of his journeys, he became acquainted with a young woman on spiritual matters, and so she asked him what he thought of a hymn she had just been reading. To his astonishment he found it to be none other than his own composition. He tried to evade her question, but she continued to press him for a response. Suddenly he began to weep. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he said, "I am the man who wrote that hymn many years ago. I'd give anything to experience again the joy I knew then." Although greatly surprised, she reassured him that the "streams of mercy" mentioned in his song still flowed. Mr. Robinson was deeply touched. Turning his "wandering heart" to the Lord, he was restored to full fellowship. —H. G. Bosch

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**Spiritual Decline** - "The symptoms of spiritual decline," says Dr. Payson, "are like those which attend the decay of bodily health. It generally commences with loss of appetite and a disrelish for wholesome food, prayer, reading the Scriptures and devotional books. Whenever you perceive these symptoms, be alarmed, for your spiritual health is in danger: apply immediately to the great Physician for a cure."

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**A Fresh Start** - Read: Acts 9:1-9

Lord, what do You want me to do? —Acts 9:6

On June 6, 1944, three American officers huddled in a bombshell crater on [Utah Beach](#) in Normandy, France. Realizing the tide had carried them to the wrong place on the beach, the trio made an impromptu decision: "We'll start the battle from right here." They needed to move forward from a difficult starting point.

Saul found himself in a difficult place, needing to make a decision after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-20). Suddenly, the location and direction of his life was revealed to him as a mistake, his prior life perhaps even feeling like a waste. Moving forward would be difficult and would require hard and uncomfortable work, perhaps even facing the Christian families whose lives he had torn apart. But he responded, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6).

We often find ourselves in unexpected places, places we never planned nor wanted to be. We may be drowning in debt, inhibited by physical barriers, or suffering under the weight of sin's consequences. Whether Christ finds us this day in a prison cell or a palace, whether He finds us broken and broke or absorbed by our own selfish desires, Scripture tells us to heed Paul's advice to forget what lies behind and to press forward toward Christ (Phil. 3:13-14-note). The past is no barrier to moving forward with Him.

Are you paralyzed by your past? Have you drifted away from Christ? Or perhaps never even met Him? Today is the day to begin

anew with Christ, even if you've tried and failed before.

### It's not too late for a fresh start.

INSIGHT: When we read the dialogue between Saul and Jesus on the road to Damascus, we sometimes overlook the fact that Saul exercised a choice. When he realized it was Jesus talking to him, he asked a deliberate question: "[W]hat do you want me to do?" (Acts 9:6). When walking our own Damascus road, we may need to ask the Lord the same question.

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**See All Evil** - Read: Ephesians 5:1-17

It is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. —Ephesians 5:12<sup>note</sup>

While waiting at the doctor's office, I read an article about the importance of freedom of speech. The writer suggested that producing obscene movies and pornography is good because it helps us to see our own potential for evil. He believes that naively thinking we are innocent is worse than knowing about and watching evil.

This rationale for evil is disturbing, especially for those of us who follow Christ. God doesn't expect us to avoid all contact with wickedness. Jesus—God in the flesh—loves sinners. But in the book of Ephesians, Paul said: "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret" (Eph 5:11-12).

Our responsibility is to expose evil by living a life of "goodness, righteousness, and truth" (v.9), and by not taking part in "the unfruitful works of darkness" (v.11). Hendriksen's New Testament Commentary says that the conduct of believers as children of light exposes the deeds of those in darkness and reveals the vast contrast between the two.

It's not realistic or wise to hide in a "holy cocoon." But we don't need to see evil to understand our propensity to sin. Expose the darkness by living in the Light.

Lord, keep us from entanglements  
That choke Your Spirit's work within,  
So we can then reflect Your light  
Into a world that's dark with sin.  
—Sper

**Children of the light will not be comfortable in the dark.**

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**God Fights Against Us** - Read: Joel 2:12-17

Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him? —Joel 2:14

In Joel's book of prophecy, God declared: "I am in the midst of Israel ... My people shall never be put to shame" (Joel 2:27). But earlier in the chapter God promised to fight against His people. A plague of locusts would descend like a ravenous army on the nation (Joel 2:2-11).

It's hard to fathom that the Lord would fight against His chosen people. But Israel had given their affections to other gods.

In fact, God had fought against them before. "Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity" (Judges 2:15).

I have learned that if my own heart wanders away from God, I can count on Him to fight to bring me back. If I become proud and self-assured, if reading God's Word and spending time in prayer seem like a waste of time, God will step in and deal with me.

God will fight against us for our good. He permits us to experience defeat so that we will listen to Him when He says, "Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Joel 2:13).

Don't wait for God to fight against you before you seek His face. Return to Him today. [Our Daily Bread](#)

Because our Father's heart is grieved  
Each time we go astray,  
He lifts His chastening hand in love  
To help us find His way.  
—D. De Haan

**God's hand of discipline is a hand of love.**

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**Count On It!** - Read: Galatians 6:1-10

Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. —Galatians 6:7-note

A children's book called *The Chance World* describes an imaginary planet where everything happens unpredictably. For example, the sun might rise one day or it might not, and it might appear at any hour. Some days the moon might come up in its place. One day you might jump up and not come down, and the next day find gravity so strong you can't even lift your feet.

Scottish biologist Henry Drummond commented that in such a place, where natural law was nonexistent, "reason would be impossible. It would become a lunatic world with a population of lunatics."

We should be thankful for the dependability of the natural laws that the Creator has set in motion. They are a great benefit to us if we recognize and respect them. If we violate those laws, however, we will suffer the consequences.

That is also true of God's spiritual laws, such as the one in today's text. The person who ignores God's standards and caters to sinful appetites can expect destruction. But the person who follows the leading of the Holy Spirit will experience the blessings of everlasting life.

God's laws never fail. For better or worse, you will reap what you sow. Count on it! [Our Daily Bread](#)

Surer than autumn's harvests  
Are harvests of thought and deed;  
Like those that our hands have planted,  
The yield will be like the seed.  
—Harris

**When we sow seeds of sin,  
we can count on a harvest of judgment.**

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**Dirty Laundry** - Read: Leviticus 10:8-11, 1 Corinthians 2:13-16

Distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean. —Leviticus 10:10

Whenever my husband and I leave the house, our dog Maggie goes sniffing for old shoes and dirty laundry. She surrounds herself with what she finds and then sleeps with it near her nose. The familiar smells comfort her until we return.

Of course Maggie doesn't realize she's following a levitical command to "distinguish between ... unclean and clean" (Leviticus 10:10). Nor does she know she's violating it.

In a world still swirling in sin long after its catastrophic collision with evil, God commanded His followers to live holy lives (Leviticus 11:45-note). Distinguishing between clean and unclean is essential to that task.

Such discernment requires more than finely tuned physical senses. The apostle Paul wrote that the "natural man"—that is, a human being in his sinful state—"does not receive the things of the Spirit of God ... ; they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14-note). It is the Holy Spirit who provides this wisdom (1Cor 2:13-note).

Just as Maggie finds comfort in old shoes and socks, many people seek comfort in old dirty sins. We must be mindful that our comfort and consolation come from God, who loves us and who establishes us in "every good word and work" (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17). [\(Our Daily Bread\)](#)

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;  
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.  
See if there be some wicked way in me;  
Cleanse me from every sin and set me free.  
—Orr © 1966, Singspiration, Inc.

**There is no true happiness apart from holiness,  
and no holiness apart from Christ.**

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**The Divided Heart** - Read: Hosea 7:8-12

Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name. —Psalm 86:11

The Israelites of Hosea's day were trying to worship both pagan idols and the one true and living God. So the prophet Hosea used three colorful figures of speech to describe their divided hearts.

First, they were like a half-baked cake—palatable neither to God nor the pagans (7:8). Second, they were like a proud man who can't see the signs of his aging—they were unaware of their spiritual decline (vv.9-10). Third, they were like a senseless dove—flying from one pagan nation to another in a vain quest for help (v.11).

Today, we as Christians are often afflicted with the same divided-heart syndrome. We believe on Jesus but are reluctant to commit every area of our lives to Him. We go to church but don't want to live out our faith each day if it deprives us of worldly success or pleasure. A divided heart, though, results in some serious consequences. First, we don't please God or attract nonbelievers to Christ. Second, it may take a crisis to show us our true spiritual decline. And third, we live unfulfilled lives, even though we flit from one worldly pleasure to another.

Let's pray each day, "Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11 see note). ([Our Daily Bread](#))

An undivided heart, O Lord,  
Is what we need each day,  
For we are prone to compromise  
And wander from Your way.  
—D. De Haan

**A divided heart multiplies our problems.**  
**(See Topic Heart)**

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**Weed Control** - Read: Mark 4:13-20

The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things ... choke the Word. —Mark 4:19

The Parrotfeather is an attractive aquatic plant that looks like a forest of small fir trees growing on top of the water. In the springtime it produces a blanket of small, white flowers. But it's a noxious weed. It forms a dense mat of vegetation that covers the surface of lakes and ponds, crowding out native plants and destroying fish and wildlife habitat.

Recently I was hiking by a small lake in Washington State that was choked with Parrotfeather plants. It occurred to me that, like that weed, "the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful," as Jesus taught in Mark 4:13-20.

Jesus was talking about how unbelievers receive the gospel, but His words can apply to us as well. Sometimes when we read God's Word, our minds are taken up with troubles, worries, and fears. The pressure of things to be done today and concerns about tomorrow's decisions are "weeds" that can choke the Word and make it unprofitable.

To control the weeds, we must ask God to quiet our hearts so we can pay attention to Him (Psalm 46:10). When we turn our worries over to God, we'll be free to enjoy His presence and hear what He has to say. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

The weeds will take over and choke out good fruit;  
But you can control them—just follow this plan:  
Make sure that the seed of God's Word has deep root,  
And pull out the weeds just as soon as you can.  
—Hess

**To uproot the weeds of anxious care,**  
**get down on your knees.**

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**Wake Up And Live** - Read: Revelation 3:1-6

I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. —Revelation 3:1

It happened more than 30 years ago but it still hurts. During a period of spiritual rebellion, I ran into a young man I had introduced to Christ. He was stunned to discover that I had walked away from the Lord and was no longer the person he had known. It is one of



my most regretted experiences, and I still pray for an opportunity to make it right with him.

During those wandering years, I would have fit in comfortably as a member of the First Church of Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6). My dilemma, like theirs, was that people thought I was the person I used to be.

The risen Lord confronted the church in Sardis: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God” (Revelation 3:1-2).

Their reputation for being alive didn’t match reality. They were spiritually dead. But there was still hope. The Lord told them to wake up and fan the spark of spiritual life still in them. “Hold fast and repent,” He warned (v.3).

Pretending to be what we aren’t is a heavy burden to bear. Our Lord calls us to lay it down, repent, come back to Him, and live. [Our Daily Bread](#)

O Lord, return to me Your power  
That once by grace I knew;  
Forgive the sin that grieved Your heart,  
And help me to be true.  
—Anon.

**No matter how far you’ve run from God,  
He’s only a prayer away.**

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**Breaking The Spin Cycle** - Read: John 8:42-47

[Satan] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him...  
He is a liar and the father of it. —John 8:44

Politicians are adept at “spinning” the details of a story to advance their own agenda. During a political campaign, spin doctors massage stories to ensure that their candidate is cast in a positive light—often at the expense of the truth. This leaves us with serious questions about what the real truth is.

According to Jesus, Satan is the “spin doctor” of hell—the master deceiver who “speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar” (John 8:44). He casts himself as the one who wants to give us unfettered freedom and pleasure, carefully masking his plan to steal, kill, and destroy us (John 10:10). He even spins the loving laws of God by claiming that God’s boundaries are restrictive, simply intended to take all the fun out of living. When we buy into Satan’s damaging lies, we will eventually find ourselves empty and broken—sidelined in our journey with God.

Thankfully, Jesus warns us. He says that Satan is the father of lies. And we know Satan is lying when what he tells us contradicts God’s Word. Jesus, on the other hand, is the truth (John 14:6). So, when it comes to sorting out the spin, our only defense against the spin doctor of hell is to listen constantly for the voice of Jesus as we pray and study His Word. And that’s the truth! ([Our Daily Bread](#))

The devil is crafty, deceptive, and sly;  
He cleverly tricks us to swallow his lie.  
But his cunning methods we’re sure to discern  
If we make God’s warnings our daily concern.  
—D. De Haan

**God’s truth stops the spin of Satan’s lies.**

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**Make A U-Turn** - Read: Psalm 32:1-5

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. —Isaiah 53:6

When we went on a weekend road trip with some friends, we had our first experience using a Global Positioning System. The GPS has a female voice, so our friends John and Mary call their device Gladys. We programmed our destination into the GPS, and she did her job and plotted our course. Then we sat back. Having put our faith in this little navigator, we let her direct us.

“Turn right in .2 miles,” Gladys said confidently. She was right—Gladys is always right. In fact, when we made an unexpected detour

to get gas, she got a bit insistent: "Please make a U-turn ... Please make a U-turn at your earliest convenience!"

Gladys had calculated a route for us, but we had gone a different way. That was our choice, naturally. But if we had continued going our own way, we would have become lost.

Isaiah 53:6 reminds us that just like sheep, we have a tendency to go astray. That's why we need a Shepherd to guide us and a Savior to pay the penalty for our sin.

No matter how far you've traveled in the wrong direction, it's not too late to turn around. God is ready to forgive and restore (Ps. 32:5). If you're headed down the wrong road, please make a U-turn. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

I've strayed, O Lord, and turned aside,  
I've disobeyed Your voice;  
But now with contrite heart I turn  
And make Your will my choice.  
—D. De Haan

**No matter how far you've run from God,  
He's only a prayer away.**

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### **A Breach In The Wall** - Read: Nehemiah 4:7-18

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father. —1 John 2:16<sup>note</sup>

The 4,000-mile-long Great Wall of China was built to keep out invaders from the north. The first wall was constructed by Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China, who lived between 259 and 210 bc. But in ad 1644 the Manchus broke through the Great Wall and overran China. They did this by bribing a general of the Ming dynasty to open the gates.

During the reconstruction of ancient Jerusalem, Nehemiah understood the acute danger posed by those who opposed the rebuilding of the city's ruined walls. So he commanded constant vigilance. Half of the workers were to stand watch while half rebuilt the walls (Neh. 4:13-18). As Christians, we must be vigilant that nothing breaches our spiritual defenses. Even the most mature believer can never afford to let down his guard. The apostle John warns us of enemies from three quarters. He identifies them as "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). These enemies lure us away from God and His Word and leave a gap for the enemy to sneak in.

Let's be alert to what entices us today. A lapse opens the door to sin, which in turn may develop into a habit that overwhelms us. Don't permit a breach in the wall. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

It may not be some heinous deed  
That chills our hearts and chokes the seed;  
It's often just a trifling toy  
That grabs our eye and steals our joy.  
—Gustafson

The world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. —1 John 2:17<sup>note</sup>

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### **Drifting Away** - Read: Job 1:13-22

Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity? —Job 2:10

Imagine relaxing on a rubber raft along the shore, eyes closed, soaking up the sun and listening to the gentle crash of waves. You don't have a care in the world—until you open your eyes! Suddenly the shore is alarmingly distant.

We tend to drift like that spiritually. It's subtle yet shocking when we suddenly realize how far we've drifted from God. The point of departure begins when Satan steals our affection for our loving Creator by putting a deceitful twist on our experiences and causing us to suspect God instead of trust Him.

Consider Job and his wife. Both had plenty of reasons to be mad at God. Their children were dead, their fortune lost, and Job's health destroyed. His wife told him, "Curse God and die!" But Job replied, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and ... not accept adversity?" (Job 2:9-10).

There are many attitudes that can set us adrift: believing that we need more than God to be happy; placing meaningful relationships above loyalty to God; thinking God should live up to our expectations; resisting His reproofs; turning a deaf ear when His Word is

uncomfortable.

If you're beginning to drift, remember to stay close to the One who is the sole source of satisfaction. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

Lord, help me to stay close to You  
And trust You more each day,  
So when the storms of life appear  
I will not drift away.  
—Sper

**To avoid drifting away from God,  
stay anchored to the Rock.**

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**Rerouting ... Rerouting** - Read: Proverbs 3:1-8

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. —Proverbs 3:6

Don't worry. I know right where I'm going," I said to my passengers. Then an almost-human voice rattled me out: "Rerouting ... rerouting." Now everyone knew I was lost!

These days, millions of drivers recognize those words, or others like them, as a sign they've gone off track or missed a turn. The GPS device not only recognizes when a driver is off course, but immediately begins plotting a new path to get back on track.

Sometimes followers of Jesus need help to get back on track spiritually. We may intentionally veer off course because we think we know best, or drift away slowly, failing to notice we're moving further and further from the walk God wants with us.

God has not left us on our own, however. He has given all believers the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 3:16), who convicts us of our sin (John 16:8,13). When we're going off course, He sounds the alarm and triggers our conscience (Gal. 5:16-25). We may ignore the warning, but we do so to our own detriment (Isa. 63:10; Gal. 6:8).

What comfort to know that God is at work in our lives through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit! (Rom. 8:26-27). With God's help and guidance, we can continue on a path that is pleasing to Him. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

Holy Spirit, we would hear  
Your inner promptings, soft and clear;  
And help us know Your still, small voice  
So we may make God's will our choice.  
—D. DeHaan

**We're never without a helper,  
because we have the Spirit within.**

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**Come Back** - Read: Hosea 14

I will heal their backsliding. —Hosea 14:4

The people of Israel had backslidden, and God wanted Hosea to show them how much that hurt Him. So, in the first few chapters of Hosea, we read a bizarre story: God commanded the prophet to marry a prostitute named Gomer. Put on display as the faithful husband of an unfaithful spouse, Hosea experienced a pain similar to what God felt when Israel was spiritually unfaithful.

As Hosea wrote the ending of his book, he made it clear that despite the pain the people of Israel caused the living God, He still promised healing, forgiveness, and fruitfulness if they would return to Him: "I will heal their backsliding," He said. "I will love them freely ... Those who dwell under his shadow shall return" (Hos. 14:4-7).

Life for the person who turns his back on God is often characterized by guilt and dissatisfaction. The truly born-again believer who has fallen into a lifestyle of sin knows deep down that spiritual unfaithfulness to God takes a toll.

But just as the God of grace offered Israel forgiveness and fruitfulness, even so today He offers restoration to the truly repentant (1 John 1:9). Have you made poor choices that have caused you to slip away? Come back. Repent and seek restored fellowship with the Lord today. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

If you've rebelled and turned away  
From what you know is true,

Turn back to God—He will forgive,  
His pardon waits for you.  
—Sper

### It's not too late to make a fresh start with God.

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#### Prone To Wander - Read: Psalm 119:9-16

With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! —Psalm 119:10

One of my favorite classic hymns is “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” which was written in 1757 by 22-year-old Robert Robinson. In the hymn’s lyrics is a line that always captures my attention and forces me to do some self-evaluation. The line says, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.” I feel that way sometimes. Too often I find myself distracted and drifting, instead of having my heart and mind focused on the Savior who loves me and gave Himself for me. Robert Robinson and I are not alone in this.

In those seasons of wandering, our heart of hearts doesn’t want to drift from God—but, like Paul, we often do what we don’t want to do (Rom. 7:19), and we desperately need to turn back to the Shepherd of our heart who can draw us to Himself. David wrote of this struggle in His great anthem to the Scriptures, Psalm 119, saying, “With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!” (v.10).

Sometimes, even when our hearts long to seek God, the distractions of life can draw us away from Him and His Word. How grateful we can be for a patient, compassionate heavenly Father whose grace is always sufficient—even when we are prone to wander! ([Our Daily Bread](#))

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to leave the God I love;  
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,  
Seal it for Thy courts above.  
—Robinson

Our tendency to wander is matched by God’s willingness to pursue.

**INSIGHT:** Although high-tech media has multiplied the ways we can be tempted, the issues of the heart remain the same. The question of how we can keep ourselves pure is still related to the Word of God. Our minds are to become preoccupied with Scripture (Ps 119:9). Committing the Word to memory makes it accessible in all circumstances (Ps 119:11). By meditating on Scripture, we discover its meaning and how to apply spiritual principles (Ps 119:15). In addition, sharing with others what we learn can edify them.

**COMMENT:** It is notable (and personally somewhat disconcerting) that the psalmist (whether David or another makes no difference) who was clearly a man who loved God’s Word and sought God with a whole heart (Ps 119:10a) never forgot his innate tendency to wander from God. His prayer should frequently (daily?) be on our lips “Let me not wander from Your commandments!” (Ps 119:10b). We stand daily in need of divine enablement (the Holy Spirit) to withstand the gravity of our fallen flesh to draw us from the divine.

**Have you asked the Father for His supernatural provision of sustaining grace today?**

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#### Welcome Back - Read: Nehemiah 9:7-21

You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful. —Nehemiah 9:17

Jim decided to follow Christ at the age of 10. Fifteen years later his commitment had faded. He had adopted a live-for-the-moment philosophy and developed some bad habits. Then his life seemed to fall apart. He had problems at work. Three family members died almost simultaneously. Fears and doubts began to plague Jim, and nothing seemed to help—until one day when he read Psalm 121:2, “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” These words cut through the fear and confusion in his heart. He turned back to God for help, and God welcomed him. Jim’s spiritual journey reminds me of ancient Israel’s history. The Israelites had a unique relationship with God—they were His chosen people (Neh. 9:1-15). However, they spent many years rebelling and ignoring God’s goodness, turning away to follow their own path (Neh. 9:16-21). Yet when they returned to Him and repented, God was “ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness” (Neh. 9:17).

These divine qualities encourage us to draw near to God—even after we have wandered away from Him. When we humbly abandon our rebellious ways and recommit ourselves to God’s ways, He will show compassion and welcome us back to closeness with Him. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,  
Calling for you and for me;  
See on the portals He's waiting and watching,  
Watching for you and for me.  
—Thompson

**God's arms of welcome are always open.**

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**Woman Who Grew Backwards** - The lady who grew backward was a woman who lived in Virginia some years ago. In the Virginia Medical Monthly her doctor told the story: She had grown normally, married, and had three children. Life was gay until the husband and father died when the children were in high school. The mother doubled her devotion to the children. She changed her clothes to those of a girl of twenty, joined in her children's parties and fun. In a few years the children noticed that as they grew older their mother was growing younger. Psychiatrists call it "personality regression," which means "a person walking backward." Usually such people stop going backward at a certain age. But not this woman. She slipped backward at the rate of one year for every three or four months of time that went forward. Although she was 61 years old she acted and talked like a 6-year-old. She was sent to a sanitarium, where she insisted on wearing short dresses, playing with toys, and babbling like a child. Then she became like a three-year-old; she spilled her food, crawled on the floor, and cried "Mama." Backward still farther to the age of one, she drank milk curled up like a tiny baby. Finally, she went back over the line and died. (Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations)

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**THE FROST BELL** - Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Proverbs 4:23note

### Scriptural Declension of Demas

**Philemon 1:24** (~60-63 A.D.)

as do Mark, Aristarchus, **Demas**, Luke, my fellow workers.

**Colossians 4:14** (5 yr before Paul wrote 2 Timothy)

Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also **Demas**.

**2 Timothy 4:10** (~67A.D.)

for [Demas](#), having loved this present world, has **deserted me** and gone to [Thessalonica](#); [Crescens](#) has gone to [Galatia](#), ([map](#)) Titus to [Dalmatia](#).

Awaiting death by execution, Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy from Rome while confined in a chilly, dank dungeon. He was so cold that he asked for his cloak, and so lonely that he begged Timothy to come as soon as possible. He was also keenly disappointed in Demas — a former companion in the work of God. How pathetic his plaintive words, which may be paraphrased as follows, "Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas has deserted me, having fallen in love with this present world." It is hard to understand how Demas could so cruelly abandon the imprisoned apostle: However, knowing that a grave sin of this nature is always preceded by a backsliding in heart, we can be sure that Demas had been cooling off spiritually for some time before he forsook Paul to seek the pleasures of the world.

Prior to the development of thermostatically controlled heat, many greenhouses were equipped with a "**frost bell**." This was an electrical device connected to the thermometer which warned the owner when the mercury fell to the danger point. At the signal, he would hurry out to stoke his fires, thus saving his crop of fruit or flowers.

It isn't necessary to attach a frost bell to determine when a Christian is growing spiritually cold. If prayer, Bible reading, and Christian service begin to become burdensome and the allurements of the world begin to make their appeal, it's time to re-kindle the fires of one's spiritual life. This can be done only through humble confession of sin and a renewal of dedication to Christ.

Vain world, I turn away, tho' thou seem fair and good;  
That friendly, outstretched hand of thine is stained with Jesus' blood.  
If in thy least device, I stoop to take a part,  
All unaware, thine influence steals God's presence from my heart!  
—Mauro

While the Christian must live in the world,  
he must not allow the world to live in him.

—Bosch

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[Octavius Winslow](#) (1808-1878) wrote a book entitled [Personal Declension and Revival of Religion in the Soul](#) dealing specifically with the topic "What is the present spiritual state of my soul before God?" His first chapter entitled [Incipient Declension](#) is most relevant to the study and application of the truths seen in the spiritual slippage in the sad, solemn saga of Samson. Perhaps God is calling you to stop for a time and ponder Samson. If you are experiencing a weariness of soul brought on by wandering from the ancient paths (Jer 6:16), perhaps Winslow's soul "prying" work might be just what the Great Physician is prescribing to draw you from the depths of despond, apathy, etc. The following is simply a partial excerpt from Chapter 1 ([Incipient Declension](#)) to wet your spiritual appetite. Clearly the best balm is always the pure, undiluted Word, but there are times when God seems to raise up human works meant to catalyze our desires to discipline ourselves for godliness. The intrigued reader is encouraged to at least take a look at the interesting table of contents (each of which is an active link... e.g., when was the last time you read or heard a discussion of grieving the Spirit?)

- \* [Preface](#)
- \* Chapter 1: [Incipient Declension](#)
- \* Chapter 2: [Declension in Love](#)
- \* Chapter 3: [Declension in Faith](#)
- \* Chapter 4: [Declension in Prayer](#)
- \* Chapter 5: [Declension in Connection with Doctrinal Error](#)
- \* Chapter 6: [On Grieving the Spirit](#)
- \* Chapter 7: [The Fruitless and the Fruitful Professor](#)
- \* Chapter 8: [The Lord, the Restorer of His People](#)
- \* Chapter 9: [The Lord, the Keeper of His People](#)

Excerpt from **Chapter 1: Incipient Declension** -

**"The backslider in heart (Pr 14:14)."**

If there is one consideration more humbling than another to a spiritually-minded believer, it is, that, after all God has done for him, - after all the rich displays of His grace, the patience and tenderness of His instructions, the repeated discipline of His covenant, the tokens of love received, and the lessons of experience learned, there should still exist in the heart a principle, the tendency of which is to secret, perpetual, and alarming departure from God. Truly, there is in this solemn fact, that which might well lead to the deepest self-abasement before Him.

If, in the present early stage of our inquiry into this subject, we might be permitted to assign a cause for the growing power which this latent, subtle principle is allowed to exert in the soul, we would refer to the believer's constant forgetfulness of the truth, that there is no essential element in divine grace that can secure it from the deepest declension; that, if left to its self-sustaining energy, such are the hostile influences by which it is surrounded, such the severe assaults to which it is exposed, and such the feeble resistance it is capable of exerting, there is not a moment - splendid though its former victories may have been - in which the incipient and secret progress of declension may not have commenced and be going forward in the soul! There is a proneness in us to deify the graces of the Spirit. We often think of faith and love, and their kindred graces, as though they were essentially omnipotent; forgetting that though they undoubtedly are divine in their origin, spiritual in their nature, and sanctifying in their effects, they yet are sustained by no self-supporting power, but by constant communications of life and nourishment from Jesus; that, the moment of their being left to their inherent strength, is the moment of their certain declension and decay.

We must here, however, guard a precious and important truth; viz., the indestructible nature of true grace. Divine grace in the soul can never really die; true faith can never utterly and finally fail. We are speaking now but of their decay. A flower may droop, and yet live: a plant may be sickly, and yet not die. In the lowest stage of spiritual declension, in the feeblest state of grace, there is a life that never dies. In the midst of all his startings aside, the ebb and the flow, the wandering and the restoring, the believer in Jesus is "kept by the

power of God through faith unto salvation.” He cannot utterly fall; he cannot finally be lost. The immutability of God keeps him, - the covenant of grace keeps him, - the finished work of Jesus keeps him, - the indwelling of the Spirit keeps him, and keeps him to eternal glory. We say, then, true grace is indestructible grace; it can never die. But it may decay; and to the consideration of this solemn and important subject, the reader's serious attention is now invited. We propose to exhibit the subject of Personal Declension of Religion in the Soul in some of its varied and prominent forms and phases, and to direct to those means which God has ordained and blessed to its restoration and revival. ([Read more](#) )

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[Charles Hodge](#) on **Backsliding**. [October 1, 1865]

There are two kinds of backsliding mentioned in the Scriptures.

**1. that of professors; and,**

**2. that of the true people of God.**

To the former class belong the backslidings of the Israelites, which consisted in their falling away from the worship of God and the observance of his law, and in their worship of idols and following the customs of the heathen.

Such backsliding was in their case generally, so far as individuals were concerned, final, and ended in their destruction.

To the same class is to be referred the backslidings of Christian churches and communities. The Eastern, Latin, the English, Scotch, Holland, German, Swiss churches have all experienced such backsliding. In some there is a perpetual apostasy, in others, a temporary one. To the same class belongs the backsliding of professors of religion; persons who have experienced more or less of the power of religion, and have regarded themselves and been regarded by others as true converts, and have joined the full communion of the church and subsequently gone back to the world, given up their profession, and in many cases become immoral or skeptical. The last case of such persons is worse than the first. In some cases it is impossible to renew such persons unto repentance. (Heb.6:6–10) shows how great may be the attainment and how varied and deep the religious experience of such persons, and how awful and hopeless may be their fall.

## **II The backsliding of the people of God.**

This for a time may not be distinguishable from the former. It is possible that a true child of God may so fall away that he may lose all evidence within of his being a true Christian, and he may fail to exhibit such evidence to others. There is, however, all the difference between these two cases that there is between a swoon and death. In appearance the two are alike. But,

1. In a swoon there is still a dormant principle of life.
2. It is sure to revive. Whereas, in the other, the principle of life is absent and revival is out of the question.

In the backsliding of the people of God, there is, 1st. A decline in the power of the inward principle of spiritual life, and 2nd, a decline in all its normal manifestations. These go on increasing.

- a. The neglect of fellowship with God.
- b. Neglect of the more private duties of religion.
- c. Neglect in watching the heart, the thoughts, and words.
- d. Neglect of outward duties.
- e. Conformity to the world.
- f. Commission of open sin.

Decline merely in fervor of feeling, whether penitential or joyful, is not an evidence of backsliding. Our feelings depend on many circumstances. They sometimes vary with the hours of the day, with the weather, with the season of the year, with the state of the body, or with the period of life. The young are full of emotion. The old are calm. People often distress themselves unnecessarily. The true test is to be founded in the power of the principle of piety to determine our faith, our habits and our conduct.

## **III. Danger of backsliding arises,**

1. From its insidiousness.
2. From its tendency to become worse and worse.



3. From its offensiveness to God, as a great sin.

4. From the certainty that it will end in perdition, if not arrested. There is nothing in us to stop its progress, or in anything around us, or in others, Christians, ministers or means of grace. It depends alone on the purpose of God. (**Ed**: I am not sure if Hodge believed that a genuine believer could lose their salvation - In my opinion his statement about perdition can only refer to "fake believers" - individuals who claimed to know Christ but who He did not know!)

5. It necessarily involves much suffering and loss, and entails great disgrace on the cause of Christ.

#### **IV. Its cure.**

**Those who are conscious of having backslidden must;**

1. Repent;
2. Do their first works.

**Their repentance includes;**

1. A just apprehension of their true condition, and their guilt as connected with it.
2. A settled purpose to renounce everything inconsistent with a holy conversation.
3. Humiliation and sorrow for the sin they have committed, and the evil they have done.

Doing their first works, includes their return to God by the very means and steps by which they first found his favor.

1. They sought earnestly with tears and supplications, long, continual and persevering.
2. They sought it through Christ, and by application to His blood; or, by the exercise of faith in him.
3. They sought it in the diligent use of all the means of grace.
4. In humble dependence on the undeserved and forfeited aid of the Holy Spirit.

(Taken from Princeton Sermons)

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## **Backsliding in the Spiritual Life of the Godly**

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**Wilhelmus aBrake** in **The Christian's Reasonable Service** ([Online](#)) has the following discussion of "Backsliding in the Spiritual Life of the Godly":

Even though the nature of the regenerate is such that it is always disposed toward growth, and though some of the regenerate grow more than others, they nevertheless do not proceed in the might of the Lord from strength to strength without resistance. They do not always have the valor of a majestic horse in battle, nor are they always "as mighty men, who tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle" Zechariah 10:5. They do not always grow as a palm tree and as a cedar upon Lebanon. They cannot always boast with Hannah: "My heart rejoices in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD" 1Sa 2:1. Their latter works are not always more than their first works—such as was true for the congregation of Thyatira.

**However, as trees experience their winters in which they are void of foliage and fruits, appearing to be barren and dead, the godly likewise have their spiritual winters.**

The Lord Jesus said to the church, "The winter is past," which implies that it had experienced a winter. As people are subject to numerous illnesses, the godly likewise are subject to numerous spiritual illnesses. What a most blessed time it would be if there would not be one inhabitant of spiritual Jerusalem who would say, "I am sick!" Such is, however, not always the case.

These illnesses we now wish to discuss. We shall first consider **backsliding in general** and then focus on some **specific spiritual illnesses to which believers become subject**.

**When speaking of backsliding we are thereby not to understand the daily stumblings, spiritual strife, and a lack of spirituality, which pass after a short period of time.** He who is able to pray and engage in spiritual warfare will not have to complain much about backsliding. The complaints of such a believer are generally due to an increase in light and life, as a result

of which he perceives more sin than he did previously; and becomes better acquainted with the nature of spirituality, which ought to be present in all his activity. Furthermore, he has an increased desire for a more elevated and spiritual frame. Since he perceives himself yet to be so far removed from all this, he is of the opinion that he is backsliding, whereas in reality he is gaining ground.

**Instead, we understand backsliding to be the very opposite of growth: the decrease of both habitual and actual graces.** It is possible that the life in the soul becomes less viable and loses its vigor and this must necessarily result in a decline in the quality of the actions—be it regarding the spirituality or regarding the manifestation of these actions. In some, the habitual manifestation of grace will continue as before. Since, however, intimate fellowship with God—the strength of their light and life—becomes less, the spirituality of its manifestation is also reduced.

Sometimes this can occur suddenly—when one suddenly, from being in a good frame, reverts into darkness, a sinful condition, and a state of spiritual desertion.

Sometimes believers backslide gradually and imperceptibly, similar to Samson's case who, without his knowledge, was deprived of his strength. When he intended to use it, he perceived that the Lord had departed from him.

Such is also the experience of some of the godly. They proceed as they normally do in maintaining their relationship with God, and in offering ejaculatory prayers, not perceiving that they are losing ground. They neglect their devotional exercises or they perform them quickly. There are no express transactions with God through Christ, and if they then earnestly seek to begin as of old, only then will they experience what they have lost. They are then astonished that they are not able to draw near. **Some do recover from this and renew their youth as the eagle's, but others fall victim to a spiritual consumption and languish until their death.**

### **Seasons of Backsliding: Common to Most Believers**

When believers perceive that they are backslidden, they are at once ready to disown their spiritual state and to think that it has never been right with them. They cannot believe that others encounter this, believing that it is always given to others to grow. It is therefore necessary to show to them that the godly indeed have their seasons of backsliding.

This is, **first** of all, to be observed in declarations that they are backslidden.

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" Rev. 2:4; "My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD" Lam. 3:18; "For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity" Ps. 31:10; "My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me" Ps. 38:10. The wise virgins also fell asleep Matthew 25:5, and also the bride, even though her heart was yet wakeful Song 5:2.

**Secondly**, this is to be observed in the warnings relative to this. "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God" Heb. 12:15; "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed" Heb. 12:12–13.

**Thirdly**, this is to be observed from the complaints of the saints about their lack of what they previously possessed. "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle; when the Almighty was yet with me" Job 29:2–5; "Lord, where are Thy former lovingkindnesses?" Ps. 89:49.

**From all this it is evident that saints indeed do backslide, and it thus ought not to be a strange thing to you—as if you were encountering something which other children of God do not experience. You are therefore not to disown your state, for this would cause you to backslide even further.** At the appropriate occasion we have shown that true believers cannot apostatize.

### **The Causes of Backsliding**

It will be subservient to one's restoration and to his proper conduct while in a backslidden state, to be acquainted with the causes which engender backsliding. We shall therefore present the most significant of them.

**First**, the Lord at times withdraws Himself in order to try believers and to teach them to understand things which they previously were neither acquainted with nor had committed; that is, not in that manner, nor to that extent. He wants them to be humbled about their sinfulness, being desirous that they would make more use of Christ and value Him more. He wishes to acquaint them, in a vivid and experiential manner, with His longsuffering, the freeness of His grace, His care for them, and His faithfulness. To that end He occasionally withdraws Himself, even though there are no specific reasons given from their side. At least this is not the reason for His withdrawal. Observe this, for example, in 2 Chronicles 32:31: "God left him (Hezekiah), to try him, that he might

know all that was in his heart.” When God withdraws Himself, backsliding follows.

**Secondly**, backsliding sometimes results from the commission of a particularly heinous sin—a sin committed intentionally and against the conscience. This is particularly the case when this sin gives great offense. This is to be observed in David’s life after he committed sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah. The magnitude of his backsliding to which he became subject is evident from his confession, complaints, and supplication for restoration in Psalm 51. Upon the commission of such sin, God withdraws Himself and the soul loses its vigor due to this wound.

**Thirdly**, it is sometimes caused by a cleaving to sins which are of a lesser degree. This happens when in the course of everyday life we do not live as tenderly according to our conscience as usual, but rather give in to lesser sins. It can be that we yield to sinful phantasies, or think about other worldly or vain matters. This saps the vitality of spiritual life, causes the heart to be estranged from God, and results in a reduction of vigor.

**Fourthly**, it is sometimes caused by failure to make use of Christ continually unto justification and sanctification. At the outset of spiritual life Jesus was precious, we sought Him continually for forgiveness, continually came to God through Him, were stirred up to pursue justification and sanctification, and thus were growing for a season. Some depart from this way, however, doing so either out of ignorance or due to vain wisdom, whereby they are of the opinion that Christ is only to be made use of for entering into a gracious state. Having presently attained to this, they know not how to make further use of Him, for they believe that since they already possess grace, they cannot remove themselves from the state of grace and, so to speak, start afresh. They are not acquainted with the manner in which a soul ought to be occupied in meditating—while making personal application to themselves—upon the way in which God leads a man unto salvation through Christ. They do not know what wondrous discoveries they may make while doing so and how the perfections of God may be beheld in the face of Christ. They neither know what it means to delight themselves in the love of Christ; nor how they, upon having sinned, must repeatedly receive Him unto justification, applying His blood to their heart for the purging of the conscience in order to serve the living God, nor do they know how they are to make use of Him continually unto sanctification. Acting as if all this were but the work of a beginning Christian, they entrust their soul to Christ with a greater or lesser measure of assurance, and subsequently proceed with sanctification, prayer for strength against sin, and the practice of virtue. If in doing so they may gain something, make progress in sanctification, and have immediate fellowship with God—worshiping, loving, and fearing Him—they are of the opinion that they are growing. In reality, however, they remain immature and even regress from the measure of spirituality they previously had. Their sanctification lacks both purity and much of the true essence of sanctification. It becomes more a natural work and approximates the virtuousness of unconverted people. This becomes evident when either death or some other great danger approaches; at which time sanctification can be of no comfort and one needs Christ alone for support. Then one will perceive that they who appeared to be men are but weak children and inexperienced in the unadulterated way of salvation. They who grow spiritually grow in Christ. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith” Col. 2:6–7; “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” Eph. 4:15.

**Fifthly**, backsliding is sometimes caused by despondency and a disowning of our faith. Such believers do indeed have a great desire for progress and they also strive for it. Rather than progressing, however, they believe themselves to be rapidly regressing. This nearly causes them to give up, since they do not know how to overcome this. Yes, they even begin to question their faith, and if they succeed in casting their faith aside, it is as if they have accomplished something. Such will truly regress due to their foolish and wrong actions, and due to the stopping of the fountain from which their growth must proceed. They ought to know that growth cannot be detected every day; that as long as they are here below everything will only be in part; that to struggle and to strive is growth; that salvation is received out of free grace, by the merits of Christ, and in the way of sanctification; and that one must always continue to exercise faith in order to be saved.

**Sixthly**, sometimes backsliding is caused by laziness, manifesting itself either in the neglect or hasty performance of one’s morning, noon, and evening devotions; that is, if one has time for this. When the bride remained on her bed, the bridegroom departed; if we do not pray, we shall not receive. Imperceptibly the soul becomes less familiar with God and loses her vigor, even though this will not be noticed at first. Furthermore, the Lord, perceiving that there is so little desire to seek Him, withdraws Himself, and this cannot but result in backsliding.

### **Believers Exhorted to Seek Restoration**

He who finds himself guilty of one of these acts of backsliding ought to acknowledge that he himself is the cause of his backsliding. Let him justify God, and if he desires to grow, let him improve this situation. Even though we would have just cause to rebuke him sharply and to threaten him, we prefer to have compassion with him in his sinful frame, and lament over him. Such persons are generally mortally wounded, and therefore we wish to take them by the hand and lift them up. And you (to whom this applies), do not resist, but allow yourself to be persuaded and exert yourself to arise.

The Lord, who has called you and granted you life, not only requires from you that you strive for growth, but that you, having

regressed, repent and do your first works. Is this divine injunction from your heavenly Father of none effect upon you? Does it neither affect nor impress your heart? It is one thing to know your duty and to say, "I know this to be my duty and I have known this for a long time," and it is another thing to hear the voice of the Lord attentively and to take His injunction to heart. Beloved, hear the calling voice of the Lord and do not harden yourself against it. Sometimes the Lord arouses you by way of a complaint: "Thus saith the LORD; Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return? Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding?" Jer. 8:4–5. Sometimes the Lord does so by way of a threat: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly" Rev. 2:5. Sometimes the Lord does this by way of friendly allurements with many sweet promises: "Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth....O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely" Song 2:10–12, 14. Furthermore, it is the Lord who time and again knocks on your heart and addresses you inwardly: "Arise." Oh, that you would hear, and that the voice of the Lord would so resound within you, that you would arise at once and recover yourself unto the renewal of your conversion!

**Secondly**, this state of backsliding, since it is both sinful and grievous, is indeed a burden to you. How grievous it is when God hides Himself; when light disappears and it becomes dark; when the heart becomes faint and dull; when one is vulnerable to his enemies, barren, and fruitless; when a chill (due to the absence of zeal) closes up the heart; and when one languishes insensibly! How grievous it is when one falls from the one sin into the other, and the soul is filled with fear and terror upon considering the end of life! What a wretched condition indeed! Such is the nature of the regression, however, and you know and perceive it to be so. Why then would you yield to such a condition any longer? Therefore arise and return!

**Thirdly**, the longer you remain in this condition, the further you will stray. You are perhaps only beginning to backslide and think that it cannot get any worse. Beware of this condition, however, for the longer you wait with seeking recovery, the more you will deem the initial condition to have been a happy one. You will say, "Then I thought that it could not get any worse, but oh, if only I had now what I had then. If I were yet as I was then, I would still be hopeful for restoration!" And thus you will backslide more and more. Or are you brazen toward the Lord? Do you not wish to repent, but remain where you are, unless God Himself comes, picks you up, and carries you as you sometimes have to do with naughty children? Consider that God will not put up with your sulking. "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against Him, and hath prospered?" Job 9:4. God may come and make life so bitter for you, that for the remainder of your life you will lament that you have been so rancorous toward the Lord. Therefore, take care that you regress no further.

**Fourthly**, consider the price the Lord Jesus had to pay in order to merit grace for you! He, the Lord of glory, became Surety for you and assumed your human nature in order that He could perform that great work. Out of pure and incomprehensible love He took your sins upon His account, endured all that bitter suffering in body and soul, rendered payment for you, satisfied God's justice, and merited peace and salvation for you. Consider what labor He has bestowed upon you to make all this known to you and to make you a partaker of conversion, spiritual life, faith, and the hope of glory!

Thus, even if you doubt whether you are a partaker of Him, you nevertheless know of your change, prior seeking, praying, and cleaving to Him; you perceive your present grief and sorrow over your lack of light, life, love, over your estrangement from God, and your inner desire to be nearer unto God; for your previous earnestness, and for a purity of holiness to the end that you might be pleasing to the Lord. If you had sufficient light and historical faith, you would acknowledge that these are evidences of true saving faith. Furthermore, would you not give everything you had—and still have—in exchange for the entire world? You will thus perceive how appropriate it is to acknowledge what you have received. Therefore, should reflection upon all this not cause an inner melting of the heart about your backsliding? Will this not arouse the following resolve in you: "I shall return; I shall arise and return to my father; I was better off then than I am now; I wish to make a new beginning"? Oh, that the love of Jesus would conquer you, so that you would return to Him and seek Him in love! Therefore, arise and begin with new zeal.

**Fifthly**, your repentance will not only be advantageous to you, but heaven and earth will also rejoice over you. God will be pleased with it, the Lord Jesus will rejoice in it, and the angels will exult in it. "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" Luke 15:10. The angels accompany believers and take note of their conduct. Thus, when you arise from your regression—with which they are displeased—the angels who accompany you will rejoice and announce it to other angels, and together they will glorify God about your repentance. There is likewise joy about you upon earth. The ministers will see it, rejoice over it, and thank God for it. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). Believers who know you and observe your restoration will rejoice in this. After the lost penny and the lost sheep had been found, the neighbors were called together in order to rejoice together Luke 15:4–9. Even if your own advantage could not motivate you to seek restoration, then you ought indeed to be moved to cause others to rejoice in God and to glorify Him. It will, however, also be to your personal advantage. It will be difficult for you to start afresh and to move beyond mourning and all opposition, and the difficulty of this work could keep you from pursuing it. Be it known, however, that the Lord will render this task much lighter

than you can imagine. Frequently the Lord readily rewards sincere intentions and endeavors to repent. “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you” James 4:8. The father of the prodigal son “saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” Luke 15:20. Therefore, begin, and the Lord will help you and meet you in His eternal love.

**Sixthly**, let me address you once more in light of your own judgment about yourself, as you were not able to believe that you were in a state of grace. Let us assume this to be so. But what then? Are you to remain as you are? To do this would be tantamount to running willingly and knowingly to eternal perdition, for you know that no one will get to heaven without regeneration, faith in Christ, and sanctification. You may say, “It is hopeless; it is done with me; I have neglected the time of grace; I have resisted the work of the Holy Spirit; I have become an apostate, and it is impossible that such will be brought to repentance again Heb. 6:4–6.” My response is that I have explained the meaning of this text above.

However, are you not contradicting your own judgment about yourself? Are you fully assured that there will be no grace for you and that you will never be converted? You do not truly dare to say this with composure, and you will perhaps be convinced that such thoughts are engendered more by despondency, fretfulness, and laziness, than from being assured that such is the case. You know that the gospel still offers Christ to you in all His fullness, promising salvation if you receive Him with a true faith. You are convinced that you are illuminated at least outwardly, are acquainted with grace, spiritual life, and the benefits thereof. Furthermore, you are desirous to be converted, to be set free from all your sins, and to serve the Lord in the way of genuine holiness—if only the Lord would grant you His Holy Spirit to that end. You are thus to observe that it is yet not too late. Even if presently you had not received anything, you do not know whether it will please the Lord to grant this to you in the future. Truly, if you would but set aside your fretfulness and crossness, and say with composure, “I am going to hell and eternal damnation,” you would seek to be delivered with all your heart and strive to attain salvation—even if you could not ascertain if you would receive this upon your seeking. You would then avail yourself of all means, saying, “Who can tell? There might yet be mercy” Jonah 3:9; Joel 2:14. Therefore, remaining inactive will not gain you anything, and a despondent and fretful casting away of all hope will not deliver you from hell. Instead, arise, engage yourself, and you will experience that those who seek the Lord will find Him.

### **Means for Recovery from Backsliding**

If someone has been moved by that which has been said and is resolved to arise, he ought to know that active engagement must go hand in hand with this resolution. However, in order that such a person be not hindered in this endeavor, but be directed in the right way, he must be on guard against some things, and perform other things.

**First, one is to be on guard against:**

**(1) That by which he became backslidden.** Such a person ought to reflect upon his past for the purpose of discovering what it was. Having discovered this, he is to confess this before the Lord in the way of self-condemnation, enter into a covenant against it, and always be on guard against coming into the power of this sin again—having felt the bitterness of this sin.

**(2) Being despondent that things can never become right again, for despondency makes the hands feeble.** It is true that if you were to undertake your restoration in your own strength, nothing would come of it. However, it proceeds from the Lord. “The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down” Ps. 145:14; “He giveth power to the faint” Isa. 40:29. He reaches out to you, thus enabling you by His grace to lift up your head out of your sorrow, and to be resolved to arise again. He who has thus reached out to you will subsequently also sustain you.

**(3) Laxness and those motions that resist the Spirit.** Beloved, do not give heed to your lazy flesh. Let the sweetness and purity of being in a restored state be worth something to you—it is indeed worth the price.

**(4) Relationships with worldly people (that is, beyond that which is necessary), world conformity, and partial love.** Instead, choose the Lord only as your portion, seek to have fellowship with the Lord in solitude, and thus demonstrate that nothing but the Lord is able to satisfy us.

**Secondly, if you wish to recover from backsliding:**

**(1) Start from the beginning.** This does not mean that you are to reject everything the Lord has previously wrought in you, and that you are to consider yourself as being without grace in an unconverted state. This a gracious person cannot do, for that would be a denial of something he has received. It would be an inordinate act of ingratitude. If, however, he cannot determine what his spiritual state is, he must quietly let this matter rest as something which he currently cannot discern. Instead, he must proceed as a small child. If he insists on proceeding with that measure of light and in the manner in which he had previously proceeded while being in a good frame, he would immediately succumb; it would be an impossible matter for him. If, however, he proceeds with that small measure of light and strength which as yet remains, and if he faithfully avails himself of these, he will gradually increase and not only return to the condition from which he has departed, but will become more steadfast and stronger than ever before.

**(2) As he begins, he must be firmly resolved and willing to seek until the end of his life, and to arise as often as he falls down.** He should be resolved to do so even if he were never to attain that comfort and that frame which he had prior to his departure. Instead, he ought to rejoice that he may seek, pray, and strive, and that with his feeble strength he is able to do so, seldom being able to proceed without becoming faint by renewal. And if all this appears strange to him and he insists on becoming despondent over this, he will never make progress.

**(3) He must wrestle to be restored in the way of faith.** At times God will permit His children to see a glimpse of His countenance and to taste a little of the spiritual manna. The sweetness of this makes them so desirous that they would always wish to live in this enjoyment. Occasionally the Lord will do this at the outset of their restoration. The father of the prodigal son kissed his returning son immediately; however, the Lord does not always do so. He may let them taste the bitterness of their previous departures for some time and occasionally will enable them to find Him again after a long period of seeking. Thus, the returning sinner must not insist on the immediate enjoyment of sweetness, lest he be discouraged when it does not immediately transpire in this manner. If he receives this, it is to be deemed extraordinary. Instead, he must live by faith, and with uplifted heart hold before him the promises which God has promised to fulfill upon seeking. He must embrace and believe them as being certain and infallible truths which will also prove to be true in his case. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" Heb. 11:6.

Therefore, upon finding a promise in the Word of God, let him rely upon it without reservation. Let him deem these promises to be a certainty, even if a thousand spurious reasons could be produced to the contrary. Let him reason thus: "God is truthful and will confirm this to seekers—and thus also to me." Let him therefore expectantly wrestle, pray, and hope upon the Lord until He is pleased to visit him. And even if it were so that he would not enjoy this in this life, he would most certainly receive it all in heaven upon his death. Would not this seeking then have been adequately rewarded? To believe this will be to his support, will lift him up time and again, and will cause the seeking itself to be sweet. In all humility he will plead with the Lord and remind Him of His nature, mercy, goodness, and grace, the satisfaction of the Surety Jesus Christ, and His promises. He will declare that he believes these promises, will rely upon and put his entire trust in them, trusting the Lord to vindicate His Word in the presence of angels and men. Let such a person therefore rely upon the Word, engage in his duty, and keep himself occupied in seeking.

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#### **FIGHTING AGAINST BACKSLIDING** - Source [The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible page 4162](#) (

Backsliding is a season of increasing sin and decreasing obedience in those who profess to be Christians. Not every sin is backsliding. Christians must sadly expect their lives to consist of a continual cycle of sinning and repenting of sin by faith in Christ crucified (1 John 1:9—2:2). In backsliding, however, this cycle of repentance is largely broken and spiritual ground is lost. The longer we persist in backsliding, the less right we have to claim to be true Christians (1 John 2:3—4), for repentance is of the essence of true Christianity (Acts 2:38; 20:21).

Backsliding from Christ is thus a serious matter. It dishonors God, disregards Christ as Savior, grieves the Spirit, tramples God's law underfoot, and abuses the gospel. And it is a sin as common as it is terrible. God laments in Hosea 11:7 that His people are "bent"—that is, prone—to backslide from Him. The propensity to sin resides in all of our hearts, as does a deep desire to avoid repentance. Little wonder, then, that God warns us so often in Hosea, Jeremiah, and other prophets to abhor and fight against backsliding.

Backsliding usually begins when believers let themselves drift from God, His Word, and His ways. We then slip away gradually, sometimes imperceptibly. One weakness leads to another. Most commonly, backsliding begins with coldness in prayer and then moves to indifference under the Word. Inner corruptions then multiply. The world is loved more and fellow believers are loved less. Man-centered hopes soon replace God-centered desires.

Backsliding reaps bitter results. It injures God's holy and worthy name. It makes us spiritually numb so that our consciences become desensitized, and it results in the church's overall decay.

So how do we fight against this abominable sin—a sin that is so unworthy of our Lord?

First, we must return to the Lord and stop running from Him. We must heed Hosea 14:1, "Return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." We must repent by recognizing our sinful condition, remembering our past obedience, searching out our sin, grieving over it, confessing it, and fleeing from it.

Second, we must pursue righteousness by returning to Christ Jesus. To that end, we must return to a diligent use of the means of grace. That means returning seriously to the Bible. Attend diligently to sound preaching of it. Read it privately every day. Share regular devotions in your family. Memorize and meditate on key verses. Engage in a serious Bible study with one or more friends.

It also means returning diligently to prayer, even when you do not feel like it. Hosea 14:2 says: "Take with you words and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." Pray the Scriptures back to God. Attend and pray at prayer

meetings. Pray with close friends. Pray daily in and with your family. Pray for the Holy Spirit to restore the weeks, months, or perhaps even years, that the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25).

Read solid, sound Christian literature that will do your soul good. As you read, pray much for grace— justifying grace, sanctifying grace, adopting grace, reviving grace, strengthening grace, reviving grace, and sovereign grace.

Buttress your reading by journaling and/or finding an accountability partner. Two good spiritually minded friends will do you more good than ten or twenty friends who may be Christians but with whom you cannot communicate from heart to heart.

Above all, take refuge to Christ Jesus every day—yes, ten times a day. Flee to Him as your Savior and Lord, your righteousness and strength, your justification and sanctification, your praying and thanking High Priest, and your able and wise Physician. Let Him be your all-in-all. (**ED**: See related study - Expulsive Power of a New Affection)

***He is a Savior of second chances;***

***He delights to forgive even seventy times seven.***

Don't rest until you are in your old way of communion with Christ again. And be assured, He will receive you back. He is a Savior of second chances; He delights to forgive even seventy times seven.

Come back home to your approachable Savior who loves to receive penitent sinners. Welcome home penitent, backsliding prodigal—welcome home in Christ to the Father's arms, lips, words, and tears of mercy (Luke 15:20—24). Your God and Savior delights in mercy (Micah 7:18). By the Spirit's grace, believe this amazing truth, embrace it, and live it out.

## RELATED RESOURCES

- [Personal Declension & Revival of Religion in the Soul](#) - Octavius Winslow
- [Hosea 4:16 The Evil and Danger of Backsliding](#) - Sermon by Charles Simeon
- [Hosea 2:5-7 The Backslider's Way Hedged Up](#) - Sermon by C H Spurgeon
- [Hosea 2:15 The Backslider's Door of Hope](#) - Sermon by C H Spurgeon
- [Hosea 14:4 Backsliding Healed](#) - Sermon by C H Spurgeon
- [Jeremiah 3:22-23 Hope for the Worst of Backsliders](#) - Sermon by C H Spurgeon
- [Backsliding in the Life of the Godly - by the little known Dutch Reformed writer Wilhelmus aBrake](#) - an old treatise but very thorough discussion including the means of returning to one's first Love.
- [Backsliding - compilation of papers from Winslow, Spurgeon, et al.](#) - very well done
- [Backsliding - Wikipedia](#)
- [Can God Bless America?](#) - John MacArthur