

## INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth message in our verse-by-verse study of Hebrews. Our theme is "Eyes on Jesus. "The message of the book is that Jesus is greater. He's greater than anything or anyone. Within this message, the writer has included five warning sections. Today we're going to look at the first warning and it is warning us about the dangers of drifting.

When you hear the word "drift," what comes to your mind? If you grew up in the Snowbelt, you may think about snowdrifts. If you're into motorsports you might think about racecars intentionally skidding to navigate a tight turn, that's called drifting. If you're a pilot you might be thinking about wind drift, the effect the wind direction has on your intended heading. And if you didn't sleep much last night in a few minutes you might be drifting off to sleep. The word drift can mean many things—if you catch my drift.

Drifting away can be a good thing. In 1973 Dobie Gray sang, "Give me the beat boys and free my soul, I wanna' get lost in your rock and roll and drift away. "If you've ever been at one of those nice resorts that has a lazy river, it's nice to lay back and just drift along with the current.

But there is a kind of drifting that is dangerous. There are all kinds of warning signs on the Niagara River warning boaters of the danger of drifting too close to the falls. There is a dangerous kind of spiritual drifting that this passage addresses as well.

Hebrews 2:1-4. "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. "

The writer is addressing this letter to believers. There is the real possibility that a believer can drift away from God and His word. I've always enjoyed Tom Hanks' acting. One of my favorite movies was "Cast Away. "Tom plays a FedEx employee named Chuck who is stranded on a deserted island. Chuck is so lonely he makes friends with a volleyball he names Wilson. Wilson is his constant companion. When he is on a raft a huge wave crashed over the raft and washes Wilson off. Chuck sees Wilson bobbing in the waves and the current is taking him away. Without thinking Chuck dives into the shark-infested waters to rescue Wilson, but the current causes him to drift away. Chuck is constantly screaming "Wilson! Wilson! I'm sorry, Wilson. "And he breaks down weeping. Tom Hanks is a pretty good actor when he can make grownups cry over a volleyball drifting away.

But there are thousands of Christians who are like Wilson. They have been slowly drifting away from a place of great joy, peace, and service for the Lord. We all know people who at one time were faithful servants of the Lord who have just drifted away from the Lord. You may be drifting right now. Drifting is something that happens slowly and gradually. But here's the truth about spiritual drifting: You never drift toward holiness, you drift toward ungodliness. You never drift into faithfulness, you drift toward faithlessness; you never drift toward goodness, you drift toward wickedness.

John Courson wrote: "Most of us are not in danger of plunging into the sea of carnality. This week or next week most of us are not going to be murderers or drug addicts. The danger is not plunging into the ocean of perversity, but rather drifting away from goodness almost imperceptibly. "

Are you drifting away from God? Do you know someone who is drifting away? Let me give you four danger signs of drifting away.

### **1. I drift away when I listen to God's Word but my life doesn't change**

Spiritual drift occurs when we stop paying attention to what we hear. Verse one says, "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." This letter was written to Jewish believers who had heard the Gospel and had turned from all the rules and rituals of Judaism to place their faith in Jesus. But they were slipping back into their old comfortable religious rituals and rules. The first time they heard the Gospel, it was revolutionary. Grace? Wow! That's amazing! You mean I don't have to observe the Sabbath rules and the dietary laws? That's amazing! But the more they heard it, the less amazing it seemed. It became old hat.

That can happen to Christians today. You've heard the Gospel of grace so many times, that it has lost its sense of wonder and amazement. It's like the first time you fly on an airline the flight attendants go through the pre-flight briefing, and you are listening to every word. But after you've flown hundreds of times, you no longer pay attention to their briefing.

James warns about the danger of being hearers of the Word, but not doers of the Word. And Jesus asked, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46 NIV)

When you stop obeying God's Word, you face the danger of drifting away. Even pastors can drift away. You probably recognize the hymn "Come Thou Fount," but there's an interesting story behind it. The words say: "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing; Tune my heart to sing thy grace; Streams of mercy never ceasing; call for songs of loudest praise..." The third verse says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. "

British Baptist Pastor Robert Robinson penned these words at age 22 in 1757. He had been converted under the preaching of George Whitefield. At the age of 26 he became the pastor of Stone Yard Baptist Chapel in Cambridge. He preached salvation through Jesus Christ alone and the church grew to over 1,000.

But after a few years, Robert started drifting from what he had heard. A liberal Unitarian professor challenged his belief in the Bible. Robert literally fulfilled the words of his song, "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." In letters to friends, he indicated he had embraced Unitarian doctrine and no longer believed Jesus was God. He stopped reading or preaching the Bible, and his church began to decline. Over several years, he lost the joy of his salvation and struggled in the ministry. He was miserable.

According to Bible scholar Warren Wiersbe, one day Robert was traveling in a stagecoach from Cambridge to London and a young lady was reading a book. She turned to Robinson and said, "Sir, this is a wonderful hymn, do you know it?" He recognized it as "Come Thou Fount." He broke down and confessed he had written the words of the hymn as a young man, but now he felt he had wandered far from God. The young lady said, "But as you wrote, God's streams of mercy are *never* ceasing. "And through her encouragement Robert was restored to the Lord, and rediscovered the joy of his salvation. He started believing and preaching the Bible again, and he faithfully served the Lord until he died at age 55. You can drift away, but you can also return to the Lord!

## **2. I drift away when apathy replaces a desire to gather with believers**

You know what apathy is? Do you care what apathy is? They recently gave a survey to Americans asking, "What's the bigger problem in our country, ignorance or apathy?" "And the most common answer was, "I don't know. And I don't care. "

When it comes to attending church, some people just don't care. It is a simple mathematical fact that there are millions of people who are on the rolls of churches in the United States who never darken the door of the church. In almost every church I know of, about 50% of the members never give a penny, or attend a single service except perhaps occasionally on Easter.

When someone asks me, "How many members do you have at Green Acres?" My standard answer is, "We have about 16,000 members, but the FBI couldn't find half of them. "That usually gets a laugh, but it's really not true. We know where those non-attending members are. They are sitting at home right now, or hanging out at the lake or shopping right now. I've been asked before, "Why don't you just take those people off your church rolls? "

We don't want those people to be forgotten. At least they are on a prayer list, and they receive some contact from a caring congregation. We regularly call these non-attenders and ask if they want to continue to be members, and if there is any way we can pray for

them. Do you know what most of them say? "Sure, keep me on the roll. I haven't been there for years. I guess I just got out of the habit. "

We need to lovingly remind them that there's an eternity of difference between having your name written on a church roll and having your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life in heaven.

We know this was a problem among the Hebrew believers because in Hebrews 10, the writer addresses these no-show Christians. "And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." (Hebrews 10:25 NLT)

I've said it before, but going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you a car. But if you love the Lord, you will want to gather with God's people on a regular basis. But I know I'm literally preaching to the choir. You're here! Good for you! And I thank God for our television ministry. There are many of you watching me who aren't physically able to attend church, and we're glad to come into your home through our Discover Life broadcast. But if you are watching me and are physically able to attend a church, I challenge you to show up with God's people on the Lord's Day.

This past week, a delightful lady, Edith Singleton, went to be with Jesus. She was Patty Steelman's mother. Sunday was her favorite day. She loved to worship. It was the highlight of her week. As her health deteriorated, she might have to get up at 4:00 a.m. to get ready, but she was going to be in her place worshipping with God's people. Is that your desire, or have you drifted away from that attitude?

### **3. I drift away when complacency about sin replaces confession**

Christian, let me ask you a question. What are the three areas of sin in your life that you struggle with the most? Can you answer that question? How aware are you of the presence of sin in your life? Are you daily going before the Lord and asking Him to reveal any wicked thought, attitude, or deed in your life? And then are you regularly confessing your sin to the Lord?

I'm afraid that since we know we are under grace, we get lazy when it comes to sin. We know all our sins, past, present, and future, have been forgiven. So we tend to ignore lingering sins that are still present in our lives. We don't take those sins very seriously because we know those residual sins won't send us to hell.

One pastor was preaching a series on the "the sins of the saints." One of his members said, "But pastor, we must remember that sin in the life of a Christian is different than sin in the life of a lost person." The pastor replied, "You're right. Sin in the life of Christians is WORSE! They don't know better sometimes, but we do!"

Once you become a Christian, sin is still present in your life. It doesn't reign over you, but the potential to sin is still there. The Apostle John was writing to Christians when he addressed this subject: "If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts." (1 John 1:8-10)

I heard a dairy farmer say once that the hardest thing about milking cows is they don't stay milked. One of the hardest things about walking with the Lord is that we must continually come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and confess our sin before the Lord.

A.W. Tozer wrote: "The complacency of Christians is the scandal of Christianity. Time is short and eternity is long. The awareness of sin used to be our shadow. Christians hated sin, feared it; flew from it. But now the shadow has faded. Nowadays, the accusation you have sinned is often said with a grin."

If you aren't constantly aware of sin in your life, then you probably have drifted away from the convicting presence of the Holy Spirit.

#### **4. I drift away when I forget that ending well is more important than a good start**

The spiritual landscape is littered with the remains of men and women who started well, but somewhere along the track, they gave up. They left the race. They have drifted away.

Did they lose their salvation? I don't know. Were they ever truly saved in the first place. Only God knows that. I know the Bible promises that those who endure to the end will be saved.

The Apostle Paul had a laser focus toward finishing strong for the Lord. He wrote, "I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus." (Acts 20:24) Paul wanted to keep his eyes on the prize of finishing well for the Lord.

There have been many amazing stories coming from the Rio Olympics. One of my favorites came from the women's 5000-meter event. As the runners were bunched up in the turn, New Zealand runner, Nikki Hamblin, lost her balance and fell to the track. American runner Abby D'Agostino tripped over her and fell to the track, injuring her knee. Hamblin was devastated, and momentarily thought about quitting. But she felt a hand on her shoulder. It was Abby saying, "Get up! Get up! We have to finish this race. It is the Olympics!" Then leaning on each other, they limped their way to the finish line. Neither won a medal, but they are winners in other ways because they realized the importance of finishing the race.

Here's the reality: none of us have finished yet. But if you finished your race today or tomorrow would you be finishing well? Those followers of Jesus Christ who pace themselves in the race of life and still have enough gas in the tank to sprint across the finish line will have their eyes on Jesus and will hear the Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Robertson McQuilkin wrote a poem about finishing well. It's entitled "Let Me Get Home Before Dark." 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 pages of the Bible are full of great servants who didn't finish well. Samson provides a sad example of how you can drift away from God's power and blessing without ever realizing it. He made a sacred vow to the Lord to stay pure, and God gave him great strength. His strength was not in his hair, but in his faith in God. But Samson was a he-man with a she-problem. He gradually turned from God's people and got involved with a Philistine woman named Delilah. He ended up getting his hair cut in the devil's barbershop. When the Philistine soldiers attacked him Samson jumped up to repel them as he always had. Then we see a really sad verse in Judges 16:20 Samson said, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him."

## **CONCLUSION**

So, what is the solution for spiritual drifting? You need to link your life to something and someone strong and secure. You need a solid anchor. I've been told that the heaviest anchors ever made are the ones used on U.S. Aircraft Carriers. Each carrier has two and each one weighs 60,000 pounds. When the navy drops those two anchors, that huge ship won't drift in the harshest seas. We have an anchor even more powerful than that. His name is Jesus. The best way to prevent spiritual drift is to stay firmly anchored to the hope we have in Jesus. The Bible says, "Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls." (Hebrews 6:18-19)

Be aware of the danger of drifting away from God. There is a powerful question posed in this passage that you can't ignore. You could call it the big question, or the unavoidable question, or the million dollar question. But it is a personal question that everyone who drifts away must answer seriously: "So what makes us think we can escape if we ignore this great salvation that was first announced by the Lord Jesus himself and then delivered to us by those who heard him speak?" (Hebrews 2:3 NLT)

So how can you escape if you ignore it? You can't. Now way. It's hopeless without Jesus. So bind your life to the solid anchor of hope in Jesus Christ and you won't be able to drift away.

## OUTLINE

### I DRIFT AWAY WHEN:

1. I listen to God's Word but my life doesn't change
2. Apathy replaces a desire to gather with believers
3. Complacency about sin replaces confession
4. I forget that ending well is more important than a good start

### THE PERSONAL QUESTION:

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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