

COME BACK!

Frustration and dissatisfaction are the first symptoms of a backslider. No matter how deeply hidden inside, there is that despondent recognition that he is missing out on the abundant life Christ came to give. There is that uncomfortable realisation that he is rejecting Christ's love. The backslider knows that he is out of touch with God and that his once treasured relationship with the Lord has ceased. He is beginning to wonder if he will ever again experience the joy of fellowship with Jesus, the confidence of being in the centre of God's Will, the peace of mind that comes from knowing that everything is working together for good, and that inexpressible fulfillment of being in contact with and union with Jesus.

What happened? How could anyone who had experienced God's perfect will settle for second best? What on earth could have made him give up? Why did he fall away from Jesus and settle for the world?

Was it public opinion, group pressure, or social acceptance that troubled you? Did you find the going too hard or the requirements too tough? Was the opposition too strong or the temptation too great?

Why did you settle for less than God's best for you?

It is a tragic fact that in the spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10 – 18) of the Christian life there are many casualties. That is why Jesus taught us to follow in His footsteps (1 Peter 2:21) because the devil's landmines are never found in the middle of God's road (Isaiah 35:8 – 10) and as long as we stay in God's perfect will we can weather the storms and assaults with safety (Matthew 7:24 – 27). It is because of the very real danger of the enemy (1 Peter 5:8,9) that the Word of God urges us to put on the full Armour of God.

The Lord Jesus warned us that those who receive the Gospel in a superficial way and do not lay a solid foundation of full commitment will fall away (Mark 4:3 – 20). Those who only want the blessings and benefits are not willing to pay the cost and make the sacrifices. They will not last long (Luke 14:27 – 33).

Jesus further warned us that those who allow sin to remain in their lives (1 John 3:8) and do not repent of it and root it out will find that, just as the thorns choke the plants, so these sins will undermine and strangle their spiritual lives (Matthew 13:7).

Then, the Bible clearly warns of the dangers of being concerned with what others think of you (Proverbs 29:25) as that tempts us to compromise on principle and follow their example rather than the Lord's (John 13:15). We must live to please God not men (John 8:29).

Dual loyalties also undermine our devotion to the Lord (Matthew 6:24). Whatever comes between ourselves and the Lord must be rooted out and forsaken (Hebrews 12:1). If money, or ambition, or friends, or material things, or education, or politics, or desires receive more attention and importance than the Lord does, then we must choose which will be our god (Joshua 24:15,19). Jesus is either Lord of ALL or He is not Lord of all.

All too often the problem is that the backslider neglected his spiritual life. The Word of God is to our souls what food is to our bodies. Nobody can survive spiritually without feeding on the Word of God (Matthew 4:4).

You can become a spiritual skeleton by neglecting regular, prayerful and obedient study of God's Word (James 1:25).

Also, the place of prayer in the Christian life can be compared with the place of breathing in our physical lives. It is essential. Just as a man who stops breathing can expect to die, so also a Christian

who does not pray can expect to turn blue and turn into a rotting spiritual corpse within a few weeks (Luke 18:1).

The Bible clearly records the failings of even God's greatest men. All of them failed God and fell away from Him at some time in their lives. For example:

Adam fell by disobedience (Romans 5:12 and Genesis 3:1 – 6)

Israel fell through unbelief (Romans 9:32)

Saul stubbornly rebelled against God (1 Samuel 15:22,23)

Samson slept in the lap of his enemy (Judges 16:19)

David committed adultery and murder (1 Samuel 11)

Peter denied Jesus (Luke 22:55 – 62)

Thomas doubted Jesus (John 20:25 – 28)

Nevertheless, it is not God's practice to bayonet His wounded troops. We are in a spiritual warfare, casualties are inevitable and the Lord has made provision for us to return and be restored.

The Word of God challenges us:

“Will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return?” Jeremiah 8:4

In **Luke 15**, Jesus gives hope to all those suffering in a backslidden state through three precious parables:

In **The Parable of the lost sheep**: Jesus told how that, if you're part of His flock, and you go astray and become lost, He will search for you and He will not rest until He has found you. You belong to Him. He died for you. He will bring you back to the safety and security of His flock. In **The Parable of the lost son**: He tells how you are always welcome in your Father's house, and that there is great joy in God's heart as He welcomes back a backslidden son or daughter. No sin is so great but that God's grace is greater still. In **The Parable of the lost coin**: He tells how precious you are to God.

David repented of his sin (Psalm 51) and returned to God to serve Him the rest of his life (2 Samuel 12).

Peter was restored and served Jesus powerfully among the Jews, dieing for Jesus on an upside down cross (John 21:15 – 19).

Thomas continued as an Apostle serving Jesus extensively in Persia and India to die as a martyr for Christ near Madras (John 20:28,29).

How then can one return to the Lord? God tells us in His Word:

“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 28:13

“‘Now therefore,’ says the Lord, ‘Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.’ So 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; and He relents from doing harm.”

Joel 2: 12 – 13

“‘For the Lord has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused,’ says your God. ‘For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,’ says the Lord, your Redeemer.” Isaiah 54:6 – 8

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” John 6:37

“Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” Isaiah 55:6 – 7

If you want to return to the Lord your God then pray right now. Open your Bible at Psalm 51 and pray that prayer sincerely, meaning every word of it, and then look up the following helpful verses to show you the way ahead: Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1,2; 1 John 1:9; Philippians 1:6; Philippians 2:13; 1 Peter 4:2 – 5 (and as far as dealing with temptation see 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 John 4:4; James 4:7).

You will never be satisfied, at peace within yourself, until you do what you know is right: **turn from your sins and turn to God.**

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.” Jude 24,25

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