

Backsliding

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Barney had always been proud of his thick wavy hair, but then he began to lose it. Finally just one lone hair remained on top of his shiny dome. One morning Barney awoke, looked at his pillow, and was shocked to see that last hair lying there. Jumping out of bed, he ran downstairs, crying, "Martha, Martha, I'm bald!"

Barney's life and reaction is similar to the Christian who begins dabbling in the things of the world. He gets deeper and deeper in sin, slowly sliding and backsliding away from the Lord, without even knowing or perceiving what is really happening to his life. Backsliding starts in such a subtle way that most of us are unaware of it, and some may be backsliding and not realize it. It begins with wrong choices, small compromises, and then adverse changes are made in our Christian lives. Many times it is not until the backslider has some startling experience, perhaps due to God's discipline, that he sees his true condition.

In today's study we want to address the topic of backsliding. We will do so by asking various questions dealing with the subject of backsliding.

What does the term backsliding mean?

The term backsliding does not appear in the New Testament but it does appear in the Old Testament. The Hebrew words for backsliding (showbab - "to turn away") or backslidings (meshuwbah - "turning away or turning back") denote Israel's apostasy. It would suggest a person's disloyalty and faithlessness to God. There are different types of apostasy presented in the Word of God such as the apostasy of the last days committed by unsaved demon inspired people (1 Tim. 4:1). But for God's Jewish people it was a time when they refused to live by the terms of the Mosaic covenant. They would break God's covenant requirements and commands for their lives. When applying the word backsliding or apostasy to the Christian life it would refer to those times when God's people turn away from living for God and

return to questionable habits. It's a time when they lose a sense of God's presence and power in their lives.

So even if the word backsliding does not occur in the New Testament we can concur that the general idea of the word (to turn away or depart) can become part of the Christian experience.

Hebrews 3:12

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

Christians will never finally and forever walk away from God by losing their faith and belief in Him (Heb. 3:6, 14) but they can become confused about certain truths presented in Scripture (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Although there cannot be total departure from truth in the Christian life there can be temporary lapses in faith and misunderstanding about truth. The Holy Spirit of God working on the inside of them would not allow them to depart from the soteriological (salvation) fundamentals and Christological foundations of the Christian faith. Believers are those who believe (1 Tim. 4:12).

It should also be stated that genuine believers can never totally and forever abandon God in their lives (1 John 3:7-10) since God's life continually exists on the inside of them and will keep operating in some measure throughout their life by manifesting fruitfulness (Phil. 1:6). Nevertheless Christians can temporarily lapse in their dedication to the Lord and their love for Him. They can go through periods of time where they move away from loving God, living for God, serving God, committing themselves to God, and walking in fellowship with God. God's people can depart from the Lord in some measure. Not all apostasy must come from unbelievers who totally forsake everything about Christianity. Apostasy can be applied to believers who refuse to hear and accept some truths of Scripture that they need to believe and embrace. Such was the case with these Hebrew brethren who needed to embrace the completed work of Jesus Christ and not return to the sacrificial system of the Mosaic Law (Heb. 3:12). It would also be true of the believers at Galatia (Gal. 1:6; 5:4-9).

Departure can also apply to those believers who stray from their former position of commitment to the Lord and living for Him. It can

refer to those Christians who allow their lives to become corrupted by the things of the world to such a point that they lose a sense of God's presence and power operating in their lives. They can for a time depart from God and live their own life independent of God.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:10:

"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia."

When Demas forsook Paul and departed into Thessalonica he also separated from the Lord's work and what God called Him to do and how God wanted him to live. Backsliding can become a real problem in the Christian experience that can hinder our testimony and fellowship with God.

2 Peter 3:17-18 seems to stress the real possibility of believers backsliding: "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen."

Peter warns the brethren about falling "from your own stedfastness." This is a warning about apostasy in the Christian life. This is not an apostasy from faith in the person and work of Christ. It is rather a departure from the truths of the Word of God that are needful for maintaining a healthy Christian life. The word "fall" means to drop away or be driven off one's course in life. The danger of falling away or backsliding is something real in the Christian life. The way to keep from falling is to keep on growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (vs. 18). This obviously means to grow by learning to rely upon the strengthening grace of Jesus Christ and the knowledge of His abiding presence in your life.

2 Peter 1:10-11 also says:

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The reason why this warning is given to these believers (“ye shall never fall”) is because there was a very real possibility that they could fall (trip or stumble) from their present state of godly and fruitful living as Peter had just described. But instead of stumbling into a state of ineffectiveness they could make their high calling sure by living this fruitful and spiritual life that Peter had just described in the previous verses. The end result would be an abundant entrance into the millennial kingdom, which would bring rich reward and privilege (note the word “abundantly”).

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 also addresses the issue of believers backsliding: “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.”

In this case, Paul urged the church not to associate with a disobedient member who was backslidden in his life “that he may be ashamed.” This Christian brother had backslidden into such a shameful state of sin that God’s people needed to refuse fellowship with him in the local church meetings. Here was a person who was lazy and did not work to support himself or his family (2 Thess. 3:10-11). There can be no doubt about it. Believers can backslide. They can lapse into sin and not follow truth, obey God, walk with God, and fellowship with God.

What are some Biblical examples of backsliding believers?

Noah would be an example of a backsliding believer. He got drunk and lay naked in his tent (Gen. 10:20-23). *Lot* sought the fellowship of the wicked Sodomites, lost all his spiritual influence, and got drunk and ruined his own daughters (Genesis 19). We will see this in a later portion of our study. *Saul* was anointed by the Lord as ruler over God’s inheritance (1 Samuel 10:1, 24). He was said to be a spiritual man directed by God (10:6-10; 11:6). Saul even built an altar unto God (14:35) and worshipped God (15:31). However, Saul did many wicked acts at times within his life such as taking the place of the priest and offering a sacrifice upon the altar (13:8-14). Saul became disobedient and even lied to Samuel about what he had done. Because of his disobedience the Lord sent an evil spirit upon him and he tried to kill David (19:9-10). Saul actually ended up murdering the

priests of the Lord (22:17-18). *David*, a man after God's own heart, a man used to write the beloved Psalms, committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband, Uriah, slain to cover his sin (2 Samuel 11). Some of you today may know the broken heart that David experienced over his backsliding sin (Psalm 51:1-17). Oh the burning conscience of a backslider! You may need to repent of your sin just like David did and get right with God today. There is a way back as we will see at the close of this study. The way back is to repent of your sin and confess your sin before God (1 John 1:9).

A preacher of the early 1900's said that when he was 12 years old he had killed one of the family geese by throwing a stone and hitting it squarely on the head. Figuring his parents wouldn't notice that one of the 24 birds was missing, he buried the dead fowl. But that evening his sister called him aside and said, "I saw what you did. If you don't offer to do the dishes tonight, I'll tell Mother." The next morning she gave him the same warning. All that day and the next the frightened boy felt bound to do the dishes. The following morning, however, he surprised his sister by telling her it was her turn. When she quietly reminded him of what she could do, he replied, "I've already told Mother, and she has forgiven me. Now you do the dishes. I'm free again!" In a similar way God's people who have backslidden into sin must confess their sin to Him in order to receive forgiveness, restoration, and a sense of freedom once again.

Solomon wrote three books of Scripture (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon), which would indicate that he was a regenerate man and that God's desire was to communicate His eternal message through this man. Solomon did have an intimacy and fellowship with God. His prayer of dedication for the temple was certainly God-honoring (1 Kings 8:22-28). Solomon's real downfall began when he started to love foreign wives and marry them (see 1 Kings 11:1-10). His sin caught up with him, and his heart was eventually drawn away from the Lord. The world of seducing and scantily dressed women becomes the downfall of many men today. The pornographic industry and TV world of entertainment can become the cause of a man's backsliding. Wife swapping and lust for another man's wife has been the downfall of more than one Christian man. Solomon did forsake the Lord. He eventually became an idolater and did not fully commit his life to God (see 1 Kings 11:5-6). Let us beware of backsliding.

Thomas Adams once said:

“If thou wilt fly from God, the devil will lend thee both spurs and a horse.”

King *Uzziah* did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord (2 Chronicles 26:1-4). However, when Uzziah became powerful, he fell into pride and became unfaithful to the Lord and even attempted to burn incense upon the altar (26:15-19). This was absolutely forbidden by God. As he was burning this incense upon the altar, he was struck with leprosy on his forehead (26:20). King Uzziah had leprosy until he died. He lived in a separate house and was excluded from the temple of the Lord.

The Bible also tells how *Peter* denied the Lord. He cursed and swore claiming that he never knew Jesus (Matt. 26:69-75). Peter went back to his old fishing business but Jesus finally caught up with him to restore Him to a place of fellowship and blessing once again (1 Cor. 15:5). Paul's companion and close associate (Col. 4:14; Philemon 24) in the ministry (*Demas*) evidently had his heart stolen away by the world. This grieved Paul because Demas had defected from the ministry and went back into the world (2 Tim. 4:10). He no longer followed the Lord's will for his life. A Corinthian *church member* was actually living in sin with his stepmother! The church needed to discipline this man (1 Cor. 5:1-5). In fact, Paul delivered this man out of the haven and protection of the church into the domain of Satan for discipline. The purpose for this chastisement was so the brother could be restored to the fellowship of God's people in the future (see 2 Corinthians 2:5-10). Then too, who can forget the drunkenness of the Corinthians? Some of the *Corinthian believers* were using alcoholic wine at the Love Feasts and becoming drunk (1 Cor. 11:21). So at the remembrance of the Lord's death they were not fit to partake of communion or the Lord's Table. This brought God's judgment upon their lives. God's judgment was a sin unto death. The Lord took the lives of these sinning Corinthian believers (see 1 Cor. 11:30). Since they did not show respect toward the Lord's body, the Lord was going to weaken their bodies physically and even take the lives of some of the Corinthians. This is called a sin unto physical death that a believer can commit (1 John 5:16). Believers who backslide can actually be saved from God's chastisement of physical death by a spiritual saint who seeks to restore them.

James 5:19-20

“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

There are other examples we could give of believers who failed to live for the Lord as they should and who departed into sinful living breaking their true fellowship with God. But the examples mentioned above will remind all of us that we are not exempt from backsliding. We too can depart from God and not live for Him as we should and love Him as we can. You may say, I have not committed adultery, planned anyone’s death like David, or become drunk like the Corinthians. Well, you don’t have to commit these types of sins to live in ongoing carnality and a backslidden state. How about your stubbornness to repent of your gossiping ways, your envy, jealousy, self-centeredness, impure heart, root of bitterness, pride, lack of church attendance, lack of faith, lack of commitment to God’s work, and your callousness and insensitivity to the things of God? There is something within all of us, the old Adamic nature, which is continually pulling us away from God and causing us to forget God’s will and purpose for our lives. When we allow the old nature to control and dominate our lives we lapse into a backslidden state. This brings us to our next question.

When does backsliding occur?

- a. Backsliding occurs when a Christian lives in carnality.

Backsliding occurs when a believer or Christian falls away from God’s fellowship and full blessing in life because of their own selfish ambitions and sinful lifestyle. Backsliding can only occur in a Christian’s life. Why is this? *It’s because you have to go somewhere before you can slide back.* One needs to be born again and moving forward in their lives before they can move in a backward direction. Nevertheless backsliding occurs when carnality or fleshly living overtakes and dominates a believer’s life. It occurs when a Christian is continually controlled and primarily defeated by sin. It may be an outrageous sin and gross sin known to everyone, or it may simply be coldness of the heart toward spiritual things. It might be lukewarmness of the heart (Rev. 3:15-16) toward spiritual living

instead of possessing a burning love and zeal for the things of the Lord. It must be understood that when a Christian commits one particular sin they do not necessarily fall into a continuous carnal and backslidden state unless they fail to confess this sin and get right with God.

Proverbs 28:13

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy.”

A continuation in carnal living and a fixed pattern of carnal living is what causes a Christian to backslide in their day-to-day living. When a person refuses to change their sinful patterns of living they can become backslidden and defeated in their life and become carnal in their Christian experience. 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 reminds us how the Corinthians lived a carnal life:

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able *to bear it*, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”

The verse suggests that the Corinthian's were living in a continual carnal or fleshly state (“For ye are yet carnal”). Because of this they were not spiritual Christians but carnal Christians who had allowed their flesh to dominate their lives. When a Christian begins to develop a consistent pattern of carnal living then they become backslidden. When they move in a downward spiral of carnal living they are eventually overcome by sin and backslide in their Christian experience. *A backslidden believer lives more for the flesh than for God.* They live for themselves instead of their Savior. They no longer are interested in the Word of God, they no longer are listening to the voice of God, nor are they fellowshiping with God. Like Demas, they love the present world system (2 Tim. 4:10) that is against God and which is continually seeking to take them away from God's blessing and fellowship.

b. Backsliding occurs when a Christian turns their heart away from God and loves forbidden things.

Proverbs 14:14 says:

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

Backsliding consists of our “own ways” – our worldly, carnal, selfish, reckless, and wicked ways. Our own ways become the forbidden ways that are against God. They are the ungodly and selfish ways of living (Prov. 14:12 16:25). These ways of carnal living provide satisfaction for the passing moment. Let us remember that sin is always seasonal (Heb. 11:25). But when does backsliding begin? It begins when the heart of a Christian moves away from God (“backslider in heart”). It occurs when the heart begins to desire the forbidden things of life rather than the godly or right things. Backsliding begins in the heart and eventually translates into our everyday living. The text says that we become a “backslider in heart” for it’s from the realm of the heart that wicked sins originate and where personal decisions are made (Matt. 7:21: Jer. 17:9). This tells us that a person may be living outwardly pious or righteous but be backslidden just the same. This is because their heart is far from God (Matt. 15:8) and they are manifesting rebellion toward God on the inside of their heart.

1 Kings 11:9 says:

And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice.

Deuteronomy 11:16 also says:

“Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them.”

A backslider turns away from God in the realm of his heart. This is where backsliding occurs. The heart is the focal point of where rebellion and all backsliding originates. *Sin on the outside always begins on the inside.* This is why there is so much warning and instruction about keeping your heart’s motives and desires pure or wholesome (Prov. 4:23). The bottom line is this. You choose to backslide and live your own selfish way. This can be illustrated in the

lives of God's people during the Old Testament. Israel was a notorious backslider. The book of Judges records at least seven occasions when Israel turned from the Lord and had to be chastened.

The book of Hosea is a book on backsliding. The prophet speaks often of how Israel had gone away from God.

Hosea 4:16

“For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place.”

The picture is of a young heifer that throws the yoke off her neck and turns backward rather than moving forward. As long as the nation responded like a young cow, stubbornly resisting His leading, God would treat her appropriately (Jer. 31:18). Israel was stubborn and refused to be separated from her sinful idols and selfish living. Because of their stubbornness God would judge them and they would become like a helpless and vulnerable lamb pasturing in the large unprotected regions. This may picture the coming Assyrian captivity upon the nation due to God's people losing His protective hand.

Hosea 11:7

“And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt *him*.”

Some of you are bent on backsliding! You are stuck in your backsliding mold and are determined to live for yourself. You are like a stubborn mule who will not budge. I want to say something today. God needs to shake you up! If you are bent on living your own way, as a Christian, I can assure you that you won't get away with it forever. We will see this in another point. God's Word says we can become “bent to backsliding” or determined to go in our own wicked way. This is because we still possess the old nature as God's children and there is an inner struggle with sin. The problem of sin is still present with Christians as it was when they were unsaved.

John R. Rice recounts an incident in his life that tells us how we possess the sin nature and are prone to backsliding. He writes:

“My mother was dead and my boyhood companions in the wild west Texas cow town were rough and wicked. And one day it dawned on me that I had drifted far from God in my heart. I had grieved Him in my life. I had gotten to where prayer was not a joy and the Bible was not sweet. I was attending special services in a little Presbyterian Church. Many young people found Christ, and many Christians had their joy restored, and I alone seemed left without a blessing. How sweet was the singing! What a light on the face of the happy people. And one night as they sang,

Pass me not, O gentle Saviour,
Hear my humble cry,
While on other thou art calling,
Do not pass me by,

I cried out, ‘Lord is everybody going to get a blessing but me. Do not pass me by!’ And, thank God, all the joy came back and peace flooded my soul! I knew that my failures and my sins had been forgiven. It was as definite as if my Father has taken me in his arms and kissed away my tears and told me so! That night as I walked home across the prairie, and looked up at the stars, I made a vow to God. I said, ‘Oh, God, I will never fail You again, I will never forget my prayer time, I will never give way to temptation and sin!’ You may well smile; I think that maybe a loving and kindly God smiled at my great promises that night. How well He knew my sinful nature, my frailty and sin! ... How little I knew that God wanted trust instead of promises, and that He wanted me to depend upon Him instead of myself. But He gave sweet peace again.”

Jeremiah 3:6 speaks of the backsliding ways of God’s people:

“The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen *that* which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.”

Some of you may be playing the harlot today in that you have departed from serving and living for the Lord. You may be living primarily for yourself and doing your own thing in life. You are living the Vanity Fair type of lifestyle or having your own fling in life and you know it’s wrong. Now what are you going to do about it? God is

calling you to the place of significance, surrender, and change. Stop playing the harlot type of life. Stop playing with sin! Don't you know that sin wrecks everything! You must say yes to God's way once again and forsake that sin or sins in your life, which have been keeping you from fellowshiping with God and living for the Lord. You say, "I have many problems in my life." Yes, you do. And many times you create your own problems because you have a sin problem. Sin creates many problems in your life and don't you ever forget it. It's time to cleanse your life from sin.

2 Corinthians 7:1

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Since we have the promises of God's fellowship and presence given in 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 ("And will be a father unto you") we should want to walk with God and experience the wonderful blessing of God's Fatherly love of companionship and leadership in our lives. The only way we can experience God's fatherly care over our lives is to cleanse ourselves from sin and allow His presence to once again become real and wonderful in our lives. God wants to lead us, comfort us, and fellowship with us, as the Father, but He can only do these things when we are willing to clean up our lives. What is filthy in your life today? What has caused you to backslide into a dormant and deplorable state as a Christian? God says that we need to do business with Him at times in our lives where we cleanse ourselves from filthy living. We do this by taking the initiative to turn away from sin, or as the context teaches, separate from the sinful things or unclean things of our lives. We must learn to "touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. 6:17). We need to obey the truth about living a separate and holy life. We must "cleanse ourselves" or take the initiative to step out and do something about our spiritual condition by separating from sin.

Dear friend, step out today and mean business with God. First, we need to cleanse ourselves of the outward sins of the "flesh" (body) or what we do with our bodies. Second, we must also cleanse ourselves from sins of the "spirit" (inner man) or what we think like and long for on the inside. The motives and thoughts of the inward life need to be

cleansed since we backslide in the inner person. When we cleanse ourselves outwardly and inwardly we will reach the goal of holiness that God has intended for our lives (“perfecting holiness”). God wants us to be pressing toward the goal of holiness which means we will be growing or maturing in our holiness and do so fearing God (“in the fear of God”). This means we will possess a wholesome dread of displeasing a holy God and at the same time possess a reverential awe for His holiness. Clean up your act! God is a holy God and wants to be your Father.

Let us cleanse ourselves! In this permissive society God’s Word still condemns the sins of the flesh and the spirit. Such sins as drinking liquor, pornography, tobacco use, gossip, swearing, listening to rock music, adultery, fornication, jealousy, pride, anger, and “such like” (Gal. 5:21) are sins that need to be addressed and forsaken in the Christian life. Of course, neither the list of sins I mentioned above or the list in Galatians 5:21 are intended to be an exhaustive list. I may have missed your sin or Galatians 5:21 may not have mentioned the particular sin that is causing you to backslide. What is the sin that has caused you to backslide in your Christian life? How about the root of bitterness in your heart (Heb. 12:15) or some other secret sin (Psalm 90:8) that has been gnawing at your life? How about the sin of neglect (James 4:17)?

Let us remember our thoughts on 2 Corinthians. If you as a Christian are going to indulge in sin and live in a backslidden state then God cannot be the kind of loving and helping Father that He wants to be toward your life. Although you are His son as a Christian, He cannot treat you as a Father would like to treat His son (2 Cor. 6:18 – “and I will be a Father unto you”). Experiencing God’s tender and fatherly care over our lives and His loving companionship can only come when we seek to separate from sin or clean up our lives. We need to deal with our sin. We need to deal with our backsliding. Let us cleanse ourselves. What will it be for you today?

Billy Sunday, the baseball evangelist, always had an attack upon sin. He was quoted as saying: “I’m against sin, I’ll kick it as long as I’ve got a foot, and I’ll fight it as long as I’ve got a fist! I’ll butt it as long as I’ve got a head. I’ll bite it as long as I’ve got a tooth. And when I’m old

and fistless, footless, and toothless; then, I'll gum it until I go home to glory and it goes into perdition!"

Jeremiah 8:5

"Why *then* is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return."

Are you like these people? How about your today? Are you backslidden? Are you living for yourself and beginning to love the forbidden things? Are you too stubborn to change your life today? What are you going to do about your life?

According to airline authorities a new method for clearing ice-packed planes has been put into operation. Unlike conventional de-icers that are limited in capacity, this up-to-date equipment has ramp-side holding tanks from which hot fluid is piped to gate locations where the aircraft is parked. The ground crew can quickly tap into the source, and within minutes a constant flow of liquid is doing the job of de-icing the planes and getting them ready for takeoff.

In the spiritual realm, Christians too need an occasional de-icing. A chilling coldness sometimes sets in and they gradually become insensitive to the things of the Lord. Even worse, they become unresponsive to the direction of God and the leading of His Spirit.

What are the marks of backsliding?

The gradual spiritual decline in the life of a believer is a tragic thing. When the trend begins which leads to backsliding there are various sign markers along the way. We would do well to know these sign markers or marks of backsliding. They actually become danger signs to let us know how we are doing in our spiritual life. What are these danger signs or the marks of a backslider? Let's examine them right now.

a. A languishing love for the Lord.

Revelation 2:4 says,

"Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

First love is the honeymoon love. It's the tender love of a bridegroom for his virgin bride (Jer. 2:2). This refers to the love that we had for the Lord when we first came to Him and trusted Him as our Savior. We were filled with gratitude, with wonder, with amazement. Like a young couple in love we would look into the eyes of Jesus (Heb. 12:2), we would want to walk together hand in hand, and we would want to stay as close to each other as we could. We want to fellowship with one another and be with one another.

So why does our love for the Lord begin to languish or deteriorate, diminish, and break down? It happens slowly and very gradually and sometimes imperceptibly. Our busy schedules, our many commitments in life, and even our religious activities which begin to be done out of habit can cause our love relationship with the Lord to dwindle and fade away. And when this happens our light or testimony (Rev. 2:5) begins to flicker, falter and eventually fails. This happens when we begin to lose our love for the Lord and live for the things of the world and ourselves. When we begin to lose our love for the Lord we stand at the edge of a precipice waiting to take the backsliding plunge. Could it be that some today are standing at the brink of this spiritual precipice, tottering, and about to stumble?

Did you know that a church member might be active in outward service and remain faithful and still not love the Lord? May I say that no amount of activity can ever compensate for a lack of love for the Lord. The Lord is jealous of our hearts (2 Cor. 11:2) and it's no small thing for Him when He sees our love declining. Dear friend, are you still eager and earnest in your devotions? Are you experiencing the loving companionship you can have with God? Or is your honeymoon over? If so, you are in the process of backsliding.

A man had a fine canary whose song was unusually beautiful. During the summer, it seemed a shame to keep the bird inside the house all the time. So the owner placed the cage in a nearby tree for the bird to enjoy the sunshine and the fresh air. Many sparrows frequented the tree and were attracted to the cage. At first the canary was frightened, but soon enjoyed his companions. But gradually and almost imperceptibly he lost the sweetness of the song. By the end of the summer his "singing" was little more than the twitter of the

sparrows. Spending his summer in the wrong environment caused the canary to lose his finest song. The canary lost its song and we lose our love for the Lord when we backslide and go back to the old ways of living. There is a certain emptiness and deteriorating love for the Lord when we serve self and sin.

b. A lack of holiness and fellowship with God.

1 John 1:6-8

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

When a person’s love for holy things and holy living dwindles then backsliding has set into their lives. To walk in the light means to walk in the light of God’s holiness. Failure to do so leads to a life of backsliding. Many today want to run from the light instead of walk in the light. A consistent bend and pattern toward worldly living (1 John 2:15-17) instead of holy living (1 Pet. 1:15-16) is a definite mark of backsliding. Don’t fool yourself about your own personal sins (“we say that we have no sin”) by claiming that you don’t have any sin to deal with in your life, when in reality your life does have sin that needs to be confessed and forsaken (1 John 1:9). When you want to do your own thing and have your own fling in life, without having any regard for God’s holiness and close fellowship with Him, then you are backslidden. *Holiness begets fellowship*. The text says, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” But when we live our lives independent of God’s truth and His holy ways, it’s then that our fellowship is broken, and we find ourselves in that dark and lonely alley filled with sin, self, and Satan. God wants to fellowship with us (“fellowship one with another”) and if we will realize that our contact with Him has been broken then we will confess our sins and restore a close walk with Him.

An incident from the early days of computer technology illustrates how a small problem can lead to big complications. It was 1945, and

the U. S. Navy was working hard to get the first digital computer into operation. All of a sudden the room-sized machine broke down completely. A preliminary investigation into the problem left the technicians baffled. Finally, after a more thorough search, one of the scientists discovered the cause of the breakdown. Deep inside the computer, a moth had crawled between two electrical contact points and was stuck. The circuit could not be closed. As soon as the moth was removed, the machine began running properly again.

How about you? Has some sin come between you and God and disrupted your contact or fellowship with Him? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify it. Then get rid of it. When fellowship is restored, you'll be glad you took the time to get the "bugs" out of your system.

c. A losing interest in Christian fellowship.

One of the first marks of a backslidden believer is that he no longer shows any interest in having fellowship with other believers. He doesn't want Christian companionship. Instead of being a companion of those who fear God and follow the truth (Psalm 119:63) a backslider will find himself fellowshiping with non-believing companions or those of the world who are not interested in the things of God. The man who is in fellowship with God will not allow his life to become backslidden with unbelievers.

Psalm 1:1

"Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

When you are backslidden you enjoy the company of unbelievers who have a different view of life (1 Cor. 2:14). They make you feel comfortable in your backsliding rebellion and help you to stay in your backslidden state (1 Cor. 15:33). A backslider at one time enjoyed fellowship with God's people, praying with them, and Christians were his best friends. He had no problem identifying with Christian people. But now something has gone wrong. The backslider doesn't want to really be with Christians anymore and as they talk about God and the Bible he begins to feel uncomfortable. He may even begin to find fault with Christians and accuse them of being hypocritical or pharisaical.

My Christian brother or sister, if you feel this way, it's because you are fighting against the new nature and conviction of God's Spirit as they seek to bring you back to a holy and loving relationship with God (Gal. 5:17). I strongly urge you to seek the companionship of God's people once again and openly identify yourself with them. When you do you will take a giant step in coming back to God and renewing joy and spiritual peace in your life once again.

d. A loss of desire to attend church.

Hebrews 10:25

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

This point naturally flows out of the previous point. When one becomes disinterested in Christian fellowship the easiest way to avoid it is to not attend church on a regular basis. So the backslider will find himself missing church more than he is there. Eventually he may phase out of going to church altogether. The backslider used to attend faithfully and regularly. He could hardly wait to come to church. But now he can hardly wait until it's over. He only tolerates the service and can't wait until it's finished. Let me say that if you don't want to come to church then you must look within and realize that you have fallen back in your Christian life. A lack of desire to attend church and listen to God's Word becomes a mark of backsliding.

The following story appeared in *The Prairie Overcomer*: A fisherman who was out of fellowship with the Lord was at sea with his godless companions when a storm came up which threatened to sink their ship. His friends begged him to pray; but he demurred, saying, "It's been a long time since I've done that or even entered a church." At their insistence, however, he finally cried out, "O Lord, I haven't asked anything of You for 15 years, and if You help us now and bring us safely to land, I promise I won't bother You again for another 15!"

Certainly this is an exaggeration but it gets the point across. When we stop coming to church we will eventually find ourselves dropping off and failing in our Christian lives. Every Christian who is physically able should be in church – not on the golf course, not in a fishing

boat, or relaxing around the house on Sunday morning. Today mini-vacations, weekend outings, and recreational activities fill up our time. Our society makes it easy for us to become negligent in our church attendance. We rationalize by saying, "Now let's not become legalistic about this thing of church attendance." Actually, legalism has nothing to do with attending church. Obedience is the reason we attend church. The fact remains that a failure to assemble with other believers for worship, instruction, and Christian fellowship is an act of disobedience to the Lord. Our lack of church attendance can only lead to spiritual degeneration, unhappiness, and fruitlessness. And to send your check to the church while you stay home is not a substitute.

Acts 2:42 says:

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

I strongly recommend that you get back into a regular routine of church attendance. Join together once again with fellow Christians in singing and praying and pay close attention to the Word of God allowing God to once again speak to your heart. If you will do these things, you will soon be back in fellowship with the Lord, enjoying worship with God and His people once again.

e. A lax devotional life with the Lord.

In personal devotions with the Lord we find comfort and commands to follow that will enable us to keep our hearts in tune and our lives on the right track. But when we become lax and lenient in our personal devotional lives we can begin to self-destruct over a period of time. The backslidden Christian cuts off their communion with God not only by missing church but failing to have a regular devotional time with God where they pray and take time to hear God speak through His Word.

Luke 6:12

"And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."

While Jesus was here on earth he spent many hours in private communion with the Father. We should do the same! Jesus instructed His disciples:

Matthew 6:6

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

Have you gone into the closet lately? Private communion with God is important. It's vital for a growing and intimate walk with the Lord. The backsliding trail always begins with failure to have a personal devotional life with God. When we no longer hear God speaking to our hearts, when we no longer receive direction for our lives, it's then that we become stale and can backslide into a state of insensitivity toward spiritual things.

It is said that John Fletcher of Madely never met a Christian without saying, "Friend, do I meet you praying?" Though often startled by his salutation, they were reminded in an unusual way that life for the believer should actually be an unbroken fellowship with God.

We might add the importance of family devotions as well. The impact that a family devotional life can have on children cannot be underestimated.

Ephesians 6:4

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Keeping the truth before our children in a positive way will help them in their own Christian lives from backsliding. We must remind them and demonstrate to them what it means to walk consistently with God in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation.

Gordon MacDonald tells the story of a Chinese pastor who was imprisoned for 18 years by the Communists because of his faith. Day after day, year after year he was assigned to work in the prison camp's cesspool. Every morning he had to wade into that stinking hole and spend his day scooping out the human waste.

He was given this job as a special punishment because he kept holding tenaciously to his faith. For his part, the pastor was grateful for the assignment because of the solitude he had. The stench was so bad that even the guards stayed far away. So the pastor had the freedom to pray aloud, sing hymns to the Lord, and recite Scripture. The cesspool had become a garden of communion with God. Dear friend, in the midst of the world's cesspool of iniquity that we live today, there can be communion with God.

f. A lethargic response to serving the Lord.

Romans 12:11

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”

A lack of service for the Lord is another sure mark of a backslidden believer. This command in Romans 12:11 was given to believers to remind them to keep being faithful in their service for the Lord. This is because we can become sidetracked and begin sliding back in our work and dedication to God. This is why some of the Ephesian brethren were urged to awake out of their lethargic state of inactivity for the Lord.

Ephesians 5:14

“Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”

It was a tragic story. Two young women lost their lives in a fire that swept through their apartment while they slept. Ironically, the house was equipped with a smoke detector that was in good working order. But it had failed to operate. Why? The fire inspectors concluded that the safety device had been deactivated for a party that was held at the girls' home the night before. Someone had disconnected the unit to keep it from sounding off because of the smoke from cooking or candles. A similar danger exists for any believer who "disconnects" his daily quiet time with the Lord. The Christian who fails to live in contact with God or who deactivates his daily quiet time with God is in danger of allowing sin to sweep through his life and defeat him spiritually. The Christian who lacks devotional time with the Lord will eventually backslide and become dead to spiritual living and committed service to the Lord.

g. A limited burden for others.

Another mark of a backslidden believer revolves around their lack of burden for other people. When a person backslides they will often try to live for themselves and no longer show interest in helping God's people (Gal. 6:10) or witnessing to the lost (Acts 1:8). This is a sure sign of spiritual retrogression.

1 Peter 3:8 says,

“Finally, *be ye* all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, *be pitiful, be courteous.*”

Those who backslide have a tendency to climb into a hole somewhere so they don't have to be with God's people or have any accountability to them. They want to live for themselves and care for themselves. They lose sight of other people as they attempt to satisfy their own personal agenda in life. This of course is opposite of how Jesus told us to live (Phil. 2:3-4). The Christian life is a sharing life. When it becomes a selfish and self-centered life it's because a believer has become backslidden.

h. A lukewarmness toward spiritual things.

Revelation 3:15-16

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

When someone becomes lukewarm toward spiritual things they become halfhearted, unenthusiastic, aloof, unconcerned, detached, indifferent, uninterested, apathetic, uncaring, or lackadaisical. A lack of sensitivity or lukewarmness in Christian living is a sure mark of a backslidden believer. Living on the heights of spiritual sensitivity is the most effective way to overcome sinful inclinations. We must be spiritually sensitive to sin, false teaching, and unholy practices. The saddest point in any person's life is when they become insensitive to sin. When we lose this sensitivity we backslide in life. The following experience illustrates this truth:

A pilot said that as he was flying his small plane one day when he heard a noise which he recognized as the gnawing of a rat. Wondering what its sharp teeth were cutting through, he suddenly realized with horror that it might be an electrical wire. Then he remembered that rodents can't survive at high altitudes. Immediately he began climbing until finally he had to put on his oxygen mask. Soon the gnawing sound ceased, and when he landed he found the rat dead. The spiritual application is this. We must stay sensitive to sin and not allow our hearts to become cold and calloused toward sin. The rat of sin is still gnawing away at our lives. We must deal with it through repentance and confession and go on in victory and fellowship with the Lord.

Take a moment to examine your own personal life. Have some of these marks of backsliding become part of your life? Have they become a permanent fixture in your life? If so, you are backslidden.

1 Corinthians 11:28 says,
“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup.”

Self-evaluation is always profitable. You need to take spiritual inventory of your own life and see if you are really walking with God and serving Him. O how quickly we can slip back into the old ways of life! Almost without notice, our attitudes change and we begin to do things contrary to the will of God. We revert to disobedience and self-centeredness. We find lame excuses for our behavior. We condone practices we know we should not tolerate. We no longer sorrow over our sins. We don't even want to avail ourselves to the power of God's victory.

Dear friend, if some of these marks describe your life then you are backslidden. You are no longer sensitive to the things of God and need to return to the Lord. Have you been living in a backslidden state as a believer? Do you really love the Lord and is your life a testimony to others that you are one of God's children? I challenge you to rekindle in your heart the fires of spiritual vitality.

What are the causes of backsliding?

a. Giving in to our weaknesses

Galatians 5:17

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

The first underlying cause of all backsliding is when believers give in to their old nature. The weaknesses or sinful inclinations that are aroused in our hearts through the old nature and satanic temptation are very real (Eph. 6:12). Satan knows our particular areas of weaknesses and works on those areas. The hardest areas that we find extremely difficult to control are the very areas where Satan hits the hardest. Sex, covetousness, pride, worry, anger, critical judgment of others, gossip, and unforgiveness are just a few of them. People can suffer spiritual agony when they succumb to their spiritual weaknesses.

Romans 7:11

“For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew *me*.”

Romans 7:19

“For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.”

We all have weaknesses and Satan seems to know everyone of them. He targets his temptation toward these areas of weakness so that we might become defeated and eventually backslidden in a life of carnality and shame. A hamster will find the weakest point in a cage and target that point day in and day out attempting to chew his way out. In a similar way, Satan knows how to target our weak areas. He will chew on us, and if we allow him to, he will defeat us.

One pastor heard a pathetic question from a man who said, “Preacher, how in the world did I ever get to be where I am today?” The man who asked the question stood in the pastor’s office and sobbed after he had been charged of drunkenness. How far he had

fallen. It started out with social drinking and ended up in drunkenness. He had sat in the county jail a broken man. Let me say that people digress in their Christian living because they choose to give in to their weaknesses. They say yes to the old nature and the devil and allow both of them to run roughshod over their lives. What causes Christian men and women to fall? Why do some godly church members and joyful servants of Christ wander far from the Lord? What causes them to choose spiritual misery over a happy and proper relationship with Christ? In short, it is sin! Sin wrecks everything! And sin will wreck your life if you allow it to have its way.

b. Placing the temporal above the eternal

Matthew 6:19-21

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

The second cause of backsliding among many Christians is a love for worldliness (Rom. 12:2). We are not referring to an occasional slip into sin but a preoccupation with earthly things to such a point that sight is lost of eternal values. Many times we lose perspective and place the temporary above the eternal. Our accomplishments, goals, homes, personal enjoyments, and hobbies can become more important to us than doing the will of God. Jesus warned that we can become a slave to the things of this world.

Luke 16:13

“No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

Dear friend, we are to have but one Master. His name is Jesus Christ. No divided loyalty should occur in our hearts between Him and the world. Our commitment should be totally to Christ. When we begin to yield to another worldly master we become captured by sin and selfishness and end up backsliding. When the world begins to run our life we can be sure that Jesus is no longer on the throne of our life.

Who is your master today? Have the things of this world and your personal enjoyments crowded out Christ? Our desire should be that of Saul who was saved on the road to Damascus. In Acts 9:6 he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" We must ask this same question in relationship to our home, business, school, community, politics, and personal choices in life. Lord, what do you want me to do? When yielding ourselves to the Lord in this way we can be sure that He is our Master. Furthermore, when yielding to God's will for our lives we can remain spiritually focused on eternal matters and those things that will bring future reward.

c. Allowing adversity to overcome our lives

Jonah 4:3-4 records:

"Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for *it is better for me to die than to live*. Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?"

A third cause of backsliding is when we allow adversity to overcome our lives. When we respond *negatively* to adversity it can lead to a backslidden condition. What is your response when tragedy strikes your life? Do you go into a tailspin of self-pity or anger and never seem to get out of it? Jonah's response was negative and he wanted to just go off and die in his disgust and anger. "Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?" This question implied a negative response. Jonah had no right to be angry. A person should never angrily question what God does, even when it differs from what he expects or wants (Rom. 9:20). We have no right to question God for He is God! Dear friend, maybe you were able to stand spiritually strong when things were going well but when circumstances turned against you, then you went into what some have called "spiritual heart failure." The Psalmist had become discouraged because the wicked were prospering while he and his devoted fellow believers were facing adversity. He said in Psalm 73:2-3:

Psalm 73:3-4

"For I was envious at the foolish, *when I saw the prosperity of the wicked*. For *there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.*"

It seemed as if the evildoer was getting the true blessing. But the Psalmist didn't let this adversity plunge him into spiritual gloom, depression, and a backslidden state. Rather, he went straight to the temple and through the eyes of faith he saw the true situation from the vantage point of eternity. He realized that faithful service and obedience to the Lord were far more important than any temporal gain he might have made. Instead of backsliding into despair, pity, and anger the Psalmist wrote in 73:23-24:

“Nevertheless I *am* continually with thee: thou hast holden *me* by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me *to* glory.”

Did you catch what he said? “I am continually with thee.” The adversity did not cause him to stray from the Lord and backslide. Actually, it brought him closer to the Lord. My friend, the Lord is always ready to make His presence known to you. His strength is always available (2 Cor. 12:9) and He has promised to stand by you (Heb. 13:5). If you have become discouraged by some unfortunate circumstance in life, I urge you to come to the Lord for help. He will sustain you.

What is the cost of backsliding?

a. Loss of communion

There is a high cost attached to backsliding. When a person lingers in their backslidden state they will experience spiritual repercussions. Backsliding costs a person their joy of fellowship and communion with the Father (2 Cor. 6:16). After backsliding and losing his fellowship with the Lord David cried: “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit” (Psalms 51:12). The backslider loses His communion or sweet fellowship that he can have with the Lord. When the Spirit brings inner conviction within the heart of the backslider over his sin he is ready to repent and restore this broken fellowship with God.

b. Loss of testimony

Backsliding will also cost a Christian his testimony unless a person's condition is so secretive nobody has discovered it yet (Ps. 90:8). Imagine what kind of testimony Peter had when the girl heard him curse? It is very possible to lose our Christian testimony. Revelation 2:5 says that the Lord can come and "remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Removing the lampstand speaks of losing our testimony for the Lord. When we refuse to repent our testimony is lost. When we live in open and ongoing rebellion there can be no testimony for Christ (1 Sam. 15:23). The loss of testimony can bring wounds and dishonor upon our life (Prov. 6:32-33).

c. Loss of spiritual power

Backsliding will also cause us to lose our spiritual power for victory by quenching the Spirit's ministry in our lives (1 Thess. 5:19). When we move back into the old life we are stripped of our spiritual power. Although the Holy Spirit never leaves us in the present dispensation (John 14:16) we can sense the loss of the Spirit's touch in our lives much like David did (Ps. 51:11). When a person backslides their spiritual strength is zapped from their lives.

d. Loss of reward

Backsliding will also cost us the loss of reward when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 John 8). When we live our own selfish life it keeps us from earning reward, which we otherwise could have received, had we lived a holier life. The backslider who stands before the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) will realize how utterly foolish he was for living his life apart from God's will and plan. He will realize the wasted years of his life and what could have been had he lived for the Lord wholeheartedly. The backslider will remember how he robbed the local church of his financial giving, his help, and assistance. He will look back and think of the work the local church could have done if it hadn't been for his backsliding. He will think back on how the church could have progressed had he been faithful and how he could have helped more missionaries. The backsliding believer will hang his head in shame when Jesus returns.

1 John 2:28 says:

“And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”

e. Loss of God’s blessing

When a Christian persists in a backslidden state they lose God’s blessing and exchange it for God’s chastisement. Instead of living in the favor of God’s blessing the backsliding believer must face God’s chastisement upon his life. This is the high cost of backsliding. God’s blessing is exchanged for God’s chastisement.

Hebrews 12:6 says:

“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

We must recognize the truth that if a person is never chastened by the Lord, while living in sin, then they are not one of His children. Hebrews calls them a “bastard” or illegitimate child (Heb. 12:8). *We must remember that some people who claim to be backsliders all their lives were never frontsliders!* Let us remember that sin does not go unchecked forever. This is true even in the Christian life. God chastens His own children with deep conviction and sometimes correction.

D. Martyn Lloyd Jones said:

"You cannot backslide without suffering."

Let us not forget that the way of the transgressor is hard. Proverbs 13:15 says that “Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors *is* hard.” Numbers 32:23 also gives us this timeless truth. “But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.” Your sin will always come back to haunt you if you do not confess it and forsake it.

Jeremiah 2:19 says:

“Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings 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.”

The nation's backsliding is called "an evil *thing* and bitter" practice that would bring God's judgment against them. When the text says that their own wickedness would correct them and their backsliding bring reproof against them it means that their sin would ultimately catch up with them. God would ultimately judge the nation in spite of their political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. They would experience God's disciplinary hand of judgment. A basic life principle is seen in verse 19. God punishes us by allowing our own sins to bring pain and discipline to our lives. The greatest judgment God can send to disobedient people is to let them have their own way and reap the sad painful harvest or consequences of their sins (Gal. 6:7 – "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"). Each one of us must live with the fruit of our evil ways. Because the fear of God is not residing in the backsliding believer's heart ("my fear *is* not in thee" – Jer. 2:19) they forsake God's way and commit the evil and bitter thing against the Lord.

God's children still pay a high price for worldliness and often end up grinding at "the devil's mill of remorse." A letter read in part: "Will you please help me? The agony I feel in my conscience is like an awful grinding as I reap the results of my wasted years. I accepted Jesus at an early age, but later because I was told I was attractive and had a natural singing voice, I took a job in a nightclub. At 17 I married a man I met there. Christian friends urged me to use my talents for Christ, but I ignored them. I now have a girl 14 years old with an incurable disease. And listen, she has never been to church! God seems so far away, and I don't know how to reach my daughter. Please help me stop the terrible grinding of remorse!" The letter was signed, "A Brokenhearted Mother."

e. Loss of life

There are a few more high costs attached to backsliding. A constant stubbornness and refusal to repent of your sinful backslidden state can also cost you your life! There is a sin unto death.

1 John 5:16

"If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is* not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it."

This passage reminds us of the seriousness of sin. Sin is always serious. But there are some sins that call for the premature death of a believer (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 5:5; 11:30). Some have suggested that this is the unpardonable sin but the unpardonable sin can only be committed by the unsaved (Matt. 12:24-31). The sin unto death can only be committed by a brother as the context reveals ('see his brother'). Most of the sins which one sees a Christian brother commit are not of such a nature to warrant physical death ("see his brother sin a sin *which is not unto death*"). They are common struggles and occurrences among God's people. If this is the case a fellow believer ought to pray for those who are involved in sin, knowing that any sin, if continued in long enough, can be a threat to a fellow Christian's life (James 5:19-20). Thus the restoration of a brother may secure a prolonging of his physical life.

Nevertheless any believer who continues in sin for a long period of time, and who manifests no repentance of heart, actually sets himself up for God's chastisement. It's this type of person that is going to experience "a sin unto death" and John adds that we should never "pray for it." This may mean several things. First, it could mean that we should never pray that God would spare a brother's life if it is God's will to take the brother. Second, it could also mean that we should never pray that God would strike others with death. This is not our prerogative. God alone is the judge over this matter (Rev. 1:18). This is one situation where prayer is prohibited since God is the only one who determines when someone dies because of His chastening hand. *We must understand that the sin that leads to death is not one particular kind of sin but a continuation in sin and attitude of rebellion that causes God's severest chastisement.* Christians can be given a premature death and exit from this life due to their stubborn rebellious living. When a believer willfully disgraces our Lord, God reserves the right to send them to glory ahead of time, due to their rebellion and sin. God has the last say! Christian, do not flirt with God. You are playing with fire. There comes a time when God says, "It is enough."

f. Loss of church

A pastor made a visit to a hospital. The chaplain's office had called to inform him that a man from his congregation had been admitted as a

patient. Upon entering his room, the pastor did not recognize him, so inquired, "Are you a member of Colonial Hills Church?" "O yes," he replied, "I joined it in the early 1940's." The conversation centered primarily on Scriptural matters, especially his relationship to Jesus Christ. Quite unexpectedly the patient asked, "By the way, are you a member there, too?" He was embarrassed to discover that his visitor not only was the pastor but had been for more than 20 years.

Backsliding may also cost you your church. How can this be? It's because many times backsliding people fail to attend church as they should and eventually die off from attending church. We covered this in a previous point. The backslider will many times begin to drop out of church and eventually no longer attend the local assembly of believers (Heb. 10:25 – "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together"). Backsliding hurts the church roll and attendance.

Many times backsliding begins when we violate the command to attend God's House. Someone said: "Church members are like automobiles--they start missing before they quit." Truth and right living can begin to slip away from our lives when we become lax in our church attendance. I can tell you this. When a person fails to attend church in a consistent manner it usually becomes a precursor sign of their backsliding.

A man had been faithful in worshiping with other believers for many years. Then he became lax and stopped coming to the services. The pastor was burdened for his spiritual welfare, so one day he called in his home. The man invited him in and offered him a chair by the fire. For several moments they sat in silence and watched the burning embers. Then, taking the tongs, the pastor removed a hot coal and laid it by itself on the floor of the fireplace. As it began to cool, its red glow soon faded. The man, who had been expecting a verbal rebuke, quickly caught the message. The next Sunday he was back in the service for he knew that the intensity of his Christian life was fading away as he looked at the hot coal losing its color.

g. Loss of family

Lastly, backsliding can cost you your children!

Exodus 20:5

“Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me.”

1 Kings 15:25-26 says:

“And Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.”

2 Kings 21:20

“And he did *that which* was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did.”

2 Kings 24:9

“And he did *that which* was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done.”

2 Chronicles 33:22

“But he did *that which* was evil in the sight of the LORD, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them.”

I think you get the picture. There is so much to lose when we backslide – even our children! Our backsliding and those sinful patterns of living that we develop in our backslidden state have a way of corrupting our children. Children have a tendency to reflect their parents. How sad when we allow our lives to put a dark spot or blemish on our children’s lives. Shame on us! May God speak to all of our hearts about the serious nature and dark side of backsliding?

Why does backsliding happen in the Christian life?

a. Because Christians forget God’s blessings.

Deuteronomy 6: 10-12

“And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst

not, And houses full of all good *things*, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; *Then* beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”

These are words of warning to all of us since we are prone to take our blessings for granted. We can give ourselves credit for success and forget that that our wealth, health, and position in life are all gifts from God (James 1:17). When we lose sight of the blessings of God upon our life we can soon forget God and live independent of Him. Staying focused on His multitudes of blessings, mainly His deliverance from the power of sin and our former state of living, will keep us on the right track. It will keep us from backsliding.

“Roll back the curtain of memory now and then.
Show me where You’ve brought me from,
And where I could have been.
Remember, I’m human, and humans forget,
So remind me, remind me dear Lord.”

b. Because Christians forget God’s Biblical instructions.

Deuteronomy 8:11

“Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.”

In a letter to a relative, a lady in a nursing home wrote, "I have every comfort I could wish for. My meals are the best, and they're cooked just right. My friends send me baskets of the finest fruit. But I can hardly force myself to eat. I've no appetite and I'm gradually losing weight." The poor woman had completely lost her desire for any kind of food. A similar condition exists in the lives of many backslidden Christians. Their taste for the Word of God is gone. The healthy believer realizes that the Bible is food for the soul (Jer. 15:16). They do not forget the promises and commands of His Word.

Deuteronomy 4:23 also states:

“Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any *thing*, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee.”

Backsliding is a very real possibility for Christians who lose their edge on their devotional lives in the Word and their commitment to the Lord. When we forget what God has said in His Word, due to a lack of reflection and study, it's then that we set ourselves up for a fall. When our devotional time with the Lord fades away, when we are no longer listening to God's voice through His Word, it's then we will find ourselves slipping back in our Christian commitment and walk with the Lord. *The Bible is the key to keeping us on the right track.* Psalm 119:11 says, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

The devil knows this and is all too ready to steer us away from times with the Lord (2 Cor. 11:3). The true affections of those who are walking with God are described in Psalm 1:2, which reads: “But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” When Christians forget or ignore God's instructions on how to live then they backslide. The only way back from a backslidden state is to obediently respond to the truth of God's Word. Psalm 119:67 states, “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.” It's the word of God that brings a person back from their state of backsliding. Responding in obedience to the revelation of God's truth will rescue a person from their state of sinfulness, neglect, and backsliding. What is your attitude and response to what God tells you to do and how to live? Can you say:

“I am willing Lord, I am willing Lord
To be just exactly what You want me to be.”

What are the primary characteristics of backsliding?

1. The characteristic of sliding away from the Lord.

One primary characteristic of backsliding is found in its name and involves sliding or moving away from a previous position in one's life to another position. The actual word backsliding gives us the

understanding that many times Christians make wrong choices over a period of time and gradually slide into a backslidden state.

Hebrews 2:1

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip.”

One winter there was a terrible ice storm in Grand Rapids Michigan. Everything was a sheet of ice. The busses were parked in the driveway and while sitting there they began to slide down the driveway. The ice was about an inch and a half thick and covered everything – even the grass surface. I took my fiancée and we were walking across part of the grass on the campus. She said, “We’re never going to make it across here without falling.” Of course, I wanted to make an impression upon my fiancée and said, “Trust me, trust me, we’ll get across.” As we started out onto the grassy surface of ice she said again, “I don’t think we are going make it” and once again I said, “Trust me, trust me.” I no sooner had said, “Trust me, trust me” when both of our feet went out from under us and we fell down onto the cold hard ice!! I called it the great slip!

Slipping or sliding can occur in relationship to our Christian life. If we are not careful we can slip away from our spiritual commitment to living. We can slip away from some former truth and spiritual commitment in our life and backslide. We can slip as a saint of God. Saints do slip! Why? It’s because they stop hearing and heeding the truth of God’s Word (Hebrews 5:11 – “dull of hearing”). When we stop responding to truth we are in danger of slipping away from the truth that we once embraced.

The writer of Hebrews was talking to these Hebrew believers and warning them how the truth concerning Jesus Christ’s saving and final sacrifice can slip away from their hearts. In the context of our study on backsliding we might also say that we can allow truth concerning the separated and consecrated way of living to slip away from our lives. The Greek word in Hebrews 2:1 for “let them slip” (*pararrhēo*) is a word, which means, “to flow by” or “glide by.” The Greek word was used to describe a flowing river or a boat gliding through the water. What a dramatic picture this is of allowing truth to glide away from our lives – truth that needs to be embraced. Think of

viewing a sailboat drifting with the wind out into the ocean. As it drifts further and further away you begin to lose sight of the boat. In a similar way, separated truth and living that was once embraced can slowly drift away from us into the horizon of our lives. What a tragedy!! *This verse describes that carelessness of mind which, perhaps occupied by other things, is not aware it is losing ground.* The danger highlighted is that of a great loss occurring unnoticed! How sad when we begin to lose truth which we once embraced. When we begin to slowly allow truth to drift away from our hearts and we slide back into the old way of life!

After a violent storm one night, a large tree, which over the years had become a stately giant, was found lying across the pathway in a park. Nothing but a splintered stump was left. Closer examination showed that it was rotten at the core because thousands of tiny insects had eaten away at its heart. The weakness of that tree was not brought on by the sudden storm; it began the very moment the first insect nested within its bark. In a similar way, backsliding is usually gradual. And over time you may get into a backslidden state where God must awaken you.

People seldom backslide far away from the Lord by an instant blowout. It is usually a slow or gradual leak. In some ways Christians can become like Samson who “wist not that the Lord was departed from him” (Judges 16:20). They don’t know or even realize that they are no longer spiritually connected to the Lord in fellowship and blessing. Eventually they find themselves back in Egypt (the world) once again eating the leeks and garlic. Numbers 11:5, “We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick.” Many Christians want to remember the old way of life instead of remembering the new way of life and redemption. It’s amazing how the devil can get them to look at the past instead of the present.

Someone wrote:

“The devil will be satisfied with you if you are satisfied with him.”

Beware of slipping and drifting away from the Lord. In the early part of this century, an American ship was wrecked off the Scilly Isles near the coast of England. The sea had been calm and the weather clear,

but the vessel was caught in a teacherous current that slowly lured it off its course. Before the captain and the crew realized what had happened, the ship had crashed into the rocks. In life, too, powerful currents of compromise can catch the soul and carry us to shipwreck. *Spiritual drifting* is usually a slow and imperceptible process. We know it has occurred when we have lost the strong resistance to evil and the passionate desire for truth that we once knew.

2. The characteristic of moving backward in living.

Another characteristic of backsliding is found in its name. Backsliders are actually going backward! They are not moving forward in their Christian life and experience. No wonder it is called backsliding! The Scriptures emphasize this time and time again.

Jeremiah 7:24

“But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels *and* in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.”

Jeremiah 15:6

“Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting.”

Lamentations 1:8 also states:

“Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: all that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward.”

Someone said:

“The Christian walk is much like riding a bicycle; we are either moving forward or falling off.”

I was watching several people riding unicycles through the parade at our street fair. I noticed that if they stopped they would fall off! They had to keep moving or else there was no hope to stay balanced. In a similar way the Christian life needs to keep moving in a positive and forward direction. When you stop you will fall off and get out of the

Christian race (Heb. 12:1-2). *If Christians would do what they should, there would be no time to do what they should not.*

What are the seven downward steps to backsliding?

I do not believe that any Christian backslides suddenly. It is true that we may be shocked by the sudden outward manifestation of some terrible sin in a Christian's life, but if the truth would be known, many little things have entered in and undermined the Christian life. The story of Lot's backsliding illustrates the seven downward steps to backsliding.

(1) Covetousness (Genesis 13:10). Lot "lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain." Many a man has made the mistake of fixing his eyes on wrong objects and coveting those things that should not be sought after in life (Josh. 7:21). When wrong objects become our focus we become out of focus and begin the downward spiral. When we become covetous of those worldly things that seem to be the answer to success and happiness in life we begin the spiritual downfall. Be careful what you focus on in life and what is most important to you.

(2) Choice (Genesis 13:11). Lot chose the plain or what appeared to be the easy way out. But what appears to be the easy way out in life is not always the right way! Christians are to aim high at heavenly things (Col. 3:1-3) or at the most excellent things in life (Phil. 1:9-10). They are not to take the easy way out. Let me add that Christians weaken their spiritual lives when they choose less than God's perfect will in areas of friendship, entertainment, literature, occupation, or church. Wrong choices enter into the picture of backsliding. Usually it is a series of wrong choices.

(3) Compromise (Gen. 13:12,13). Lot pitched his tent toward wicked Sodom. This was the beginning of his compromise. Backsliding begins with a little compromise and ends with greater compromise. Christians are to flee youthful lusts (2 Timothy 2:22), avoid all appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22), and have no fellowship with evil works (Eph. 5:11). There is no room for compromise in the Christian life. Lot fully experienced the gradual compromises that the Psalmist portrayed as capable of happening to the man who is not separated.

Psalm 1:1 says, “Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” The gradual progression or digression of walking, standing, and then sitting is the downward spiral of backsliding. Casual compromise (“walking”) eventually leads to more compromise (“standeth”) and more compromise leads to deep-seated compromises (“sitteth”). Compromise is a no win situation.

(4) Capture (Ge. 14:11,12). This is Lot’s capture by the enemy. The moral of this story can’t be missed. God allows us to reap the consequences of our compromise and backsliding (Gal. 6:8) and many times disciplines us in this way (Heb. 12:6). Another spiritual parallel is this. In light of New Testament truth, we can conclude that those Christians who are not wearing the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-19) will eventually be captured by the enemy. Our enemy is the devil who is walking about “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Sooner or later the devil will capture us if we begin to make spiritual compromises in our lives. Compromise eventually leads to capture.

(5) Carnality (Gen. 19:1,16). Lot loved Sodom and its excitement. He was a saved man, and his heart was grieved to a certain point at the gross wickedness (2 Pet. 2:7). However, Lot still loved many of the carnal delights of Sodom and this is seen because “Lot sat in the gate of Sodom” (the hub of civic and social life) and “he lingered” when the time came to leave Sodom. Lot could have no powerful testimony because he lived primarily for the things of the world (Gen. 19:14). He lived a carnal lifestyle enjoying the city of Sodom. Many Christians love the evil things of this world that God hates (1 Jn. 2:15-17; Jam. 4:4).

(6) Calamity (Gen.19:8). It may be that Lot was willing to give his daughters over to sin. This indeed was a spiritual calamity brought on by his backslidden state. Because of his backsliding Lot had no spiritual power. In addition, his overall spiritual outlook was hindered or warped because of his love for Sodom. By in large he had lost his spiritual moorings. When we are in a backslidden state we do things without thinking. We make choices that have no spiritual bearings and as a result we find ourselves doing the very things that bring

shame to Christianity and the name of Jesus Christ. We bring spiritual calamity into our lives.

(7) Carousing (Gen. 19:33-38). Here we find Lot drinking wine and committing immorality. His first wrong choices led him deeper and deeper into sin and farther and farther from God's fellowship. The old adage is still true:

“Sin takes us further than we want to go,
Keeps us longer than we want to stay,
Costs us more than we can ever pay!”

When Christians backslide they can end up going back to the booze holes and living it up. They somehow think they can find fulfillment and a way out by boozing it up. Let me tell you about the strong drink in our land today. God despises it!

Proverbs 23:31

“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright.”

1 Peter 4:3 speaks of the old life:

“For the time past of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.”

One who had recently been saved from a life of shame was asked by an old companion to accompany him to a tavern for a friendly drink. Being fearful of backsliding, he turned down the invitation by saying, "I'm a brand plucked out of the fire" (Zech. 3:2). The other did not understand, so he continued to explain. "Look, there's a big difference between a brand and a green stick. If a spark flies upon something partly burned, it will soon catch fire again, while a green stick can take much more exposure to heat. As a brand plucked from the burning, I dare not go again into the way of temptation." The point is this. When we come in contact with a little spark of the old life we can easily become engulfed in the flames of fleshly passion and char our Christian experience. The old life has a way of igniting in our hearts once again causing us to backslide. It's far better to stay away from those places and practices that would lead us back to the old patterns of sinful living (Rom. 13:14).

What happens when a Christian backslides?

Keeping our lives in spiritual tune will keep us from falling or backsliding. Have you had a tune up lately? We keep tuned up in life by examining our manner of living and developing these godly traits in our lives through the provision of God's nature and life.

2 Peter 1:5-10 reminds us:

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

When a Christian backslides two things will happen to him.

1. Spiritual blindness

The believer who backslides will become spiritual blind to what is valuable or most important in life (“he that lacketh these things is blind”). When your Christian life lacks the spiritual qualities or traits for Christian living (vs. 5-7) you lose spiritual vision or a sense of what is most important in life. You are no longer aware of what is central or key to the Christian life. The backsliding believer lacks discernment of true spiritual values. He lives in a dark world of shadows. He cannot see or perceive what is most important in life. There is a particular form of spiritual blindness that haunts the backslider's life. It is spiritual nearsightedness or shortsightedness – he cannot see at a far distance (“cannot see afar off” - muopazo). This means that he has lost sight concerning the future and what is most important in light of eternity! He only lives for what he can see now instead of living for what the future holds in relationship to reward, honor, and blessing (Matt. 6:19-21).

2. Spiritual amnesia

When a Christian backslides he will eventually develop spiritual amnesia (“hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins”). This means that the truth of the Christian’s redemption (freedom from sin) has lost its grip and sway on his life. The Christian backslides into the old ways of living because he has forgotten how the Lord has died to set him free from the power and dominance of sin (John 8:36). He has forgotten the price that was paid for his redemption (1 Cor. 6:20) and how he was rescued from the indwelling power of sin.

What important lesson should we learn about backsliding?

The most important lesson we can learn today is that we are all vulnerable and susceptible to the virus of backsliding. As Christians we must take heed to our own vulnerability to backslide. Don’t say it can never happen to you. It can! You can fall back into the old lifestyle and be captivated once again by sin.

1 Corinthians 10:12

“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Hebrews 3:12

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

When the English explorer Sir Frances Drake returned from his fifth voyage around the world, he was caught in a storm on the River Thames. As his vessel was tossed about and appeared ready to run aground, the old mariner clenched his fist and said, "Can it be that I who have braved the dangers of the seven seas must now come home and be drowned in a ditch?" Who would have ever thought this man would be defeated in his sailing expertise. Take heed! This is the lesson for our lives today. *It's scary to realize that most of the people who failed in Scriptures failed in the second half of their lives.*

Two theological students were walking along a street in the Whitechapel district of London, a section where old and used clothing is sold. "What a fitting illustration all this makes!" said one of the students as he pointed to a suit of clothes hanging on a rack by a window. A sign on it read: SLIGHTLY SOILED--GREATLY REDUCED IN PRICE. "That's it exactly," he continued. "We get

soiled by gazing at a vulgar picture, reading a lustful book, or allowing ourselves a little indulgence in dishonest or lustful thoughts; and so when the time comes for our character to be appraised, we are greatly reduced in value. Our purity, our strength is gone. We are just part of the general shopworn stock of the world."

What is the remedy for backsliding?

The way to remedy your backslidden state is to repent of your sins and return to God. A Christian must renounce their sin and wayward living and return to God by starting to serve Him once again and fellowship with Him. The way back is the way of repentance and departure from your rebellious patterns of living.

2 Timothy 2:19 says:

"... And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Isaiah 55:6-7

"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Revelation 2:4-5

"Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

The three steps to restoration from a backslidden condition are clearly outlined in the above verse.

1. Remember – remember the joys and delights of the Christian life.

The backslidden believer must recall or remember his former days when he lived for God and walked with Him in communion and fellowship. He must remember the place where he used to be and once again desire to return to the godly way and pattern of living. If

you are backslidden today you must remember the days that you cherished prayer and lived by simple faith and walked in obedience to what God told you. You must remember the place where you were before you fell into your backslidden condition. You must recall the happiness of those bygone days of fellowship with God and faithfulness in service. In the crucial issues of life, memory is truly a blessed gift. The believer must remember the days when he loved and served God with all of his heart. He must remember his former commitment to the cause of Christ and how he gave himself wholly to the Lord (“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen” – Rev. 2:5). However, the way back from a backslidden life will not occur with mere sentimental fondness and remembrance of former youthful days of service. You must take the next step.

2. Repent – repent of your sins and backslidden state.

The Bible says that every backslider must repent which means to think differently about his sin and be willing to forsake sin (Rev. 2:5). When the backslidden believer remembers from where he has fallen he will then cry out in despair, “O God, how I hate myself! O God, I want to begin to love You again and live for You once again.” *Repentance means that a person takes sides with God!* He changes his mind about his sins and sinful neglect before God and decides to change his manner of living. The repentant believer has a changed mind and heart about sin that leads to a change of living. Stop making excuses for yourself. Don’t condone your backsliding any longer. View it as God sees it. Your backsliding is a sin before God that needs to be corrected. It is sinful and wrong. In repentance you will agree with God and be willing to change your manner of conduct. It’s not easy to admit that you are wrong but if you are ever going to change your life you must change your mind and heart about sin and have the resolve to give up your sins. You must stop trying to justify your actions or seeking to blame others. You must face your own responsibility and sin. Accept the blame openly and honestly. You must repent. You must say to the Lord, “I have sinned and I’m sorry.” When you do this you will take the second step to be restored to God from a backslidden condition.

3. Renew – renew your Christian life by doing “the first works” (Rev. 2:5)

The repentant backslider will renew his previous commitment to the Lord by returning to his former life of faith and obedience to God. The “first works” have to do with the believer’s initial commitment to the Lord after their salvation. When believers go back to their “first love” (Rev. 2:4) they will naturally return to their “first works” (Rev. 2:5). They will once again return to the Lord and follow His will and path for their lives. They will rededicate themselves to the Lord and live for Him. Dear friend, are you ready to return to the Lord? When you return to the Lord from your backslidden state you will be back in church and you will be back on your knees praying. You will be studying God’s Word and you will once again be fellowshiping with God’s people. You will return to faithfully serving and living for the Lord. You will do the first works! Remember, repent, and renew. This is the way back to God from a backslidden condition. This is how to be restored from a backslidden state. Take the steps today.

Hosea 14:4 gives you this promise:

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

When God delivers you from your backslidden state you will be able to experience the joy of Malachi 3:4:

“Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.”

Robert Robinson had been saved out of a tempestuous life of sin through George Whitefield's ministry in England. Shortly after that, at the age of twenty-three, Robinson wrote the hymn “Come, Thou Fount.”

“Come, Thou Fount of ev'ry blessing,
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.”

Sadly, Robinson wandered far from those streams and, like the Prodigal Son, journeyed into the distant country of carnality. Until one day -- he was traveling by stagecoach and sitting beside a young woman engrossed in her book. She ran across a verse she thought was beautiful and asked him what he thought of it.

“Prone to wander -- Lord, I feel it --
Prone to leave the God I love.”

Bursting into tears, Robinson said, "Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then."

Perhaps you are like this man. You have wondered far from God and you know that you need to return to the joy and blessing of loving Him, living for Him, and longing for His companionship. If so, why don't you repent to God about your sinful and backslidden state and return to the place of blessing once again? Like the backslider Jacob, you must go back to Bethel! You must return to the place where God first spoke to you and where you sensed His wonderful presence in your life (Genesis 28:10-19; 31:11-13; 35:1-3). "I am the God of Bethel" (Gen. 31:13). Did you hear that? God is the same God who spoke to you and used you in the past. He has not changed. He is waiting for you to come back to Bethel for your renewed fellowship, commitment, and worship as in the days of old. Dear friend, go back to Bethel! Why don't you make things right with the Lord? Go back to the God that you have wandered from. Go back to the God that has redeemed you. You can return to the Lord today and call for those songs of loudest praise once again!