

I Might Be Backsliding If...

Hebrews 10:19-25

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet, warned Israel about falling away from their faith in God.
 - A. He called it backsliding: **Jer. 3:12**: “Return, backsliding Israel, says the Lord, and I will not cause My anger to fall on you...”
 - B. This term simply means “a turning back or away from God, progressive unfaithfulness.”
 - C. “Backsliding” is not an “event,” it is a process; it is like cancer; it starts out small and gets progressively worse and worse.
2. It has been said, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”
 - A. Disease is easier to prevent than it is to treat.
 - B. The same is true of backsliding.
 - C. It’s easier to prevent a person from falling away than to restore him to faithfulness.
 - D. Like successful cancer treatment, early detection of spiritual problems can lead to early treatment and prevention from a progressive falling away.
3. You’ve probably heard the “You might be a redneck if” jokes from Jeff Foxworthy; for example:
 - ☛ “You might be a redneck if you’ve ever made change in the offering plate.”
 - ☛ “If you’ve ever financed a tattoo, you might be a redneck.”
 - ☛ ******“You might be a redneck if you ever cut your grass and found a car.”
4. **3** So, in a similar way, I will organize this lesson: “I might be backsliding if...”
5. All joking aside, I urge you to consider carefully these danger signals of backsliding.
6. My goal is not to beat anyone over the head, but to exhort and encourage all of us to greater faithfulness.

II. DISCUSSION:

You might be backsliding if you’ve...

1. **4** Lost your appetite for studying God’s Word:
 - A. When a Christian quits hungering and thirsting for the word of God, serious spiritual malnutrition inevitably results (Hos. 4:6).
 - B. Lack of daily Bible reading or a failure to involve oneself in regularly available Bible studies are usually symptoms of oncoming spiritual sickness.
 - C. Jesus said, “*man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Matt. 4:4).
 - (1) God’s word is bread from heaven (Jn. 6:32) and “*He who eats of this bread will live forever.*” (Jn. 6:58); It is “soul food”!
 - (2) God’s Word is “*living water... whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst again... will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.*” (Jn. 4:14)
 - (3) God’s words are “*the words of eternal life*” (Jn. 6:68).
 - (4) They are the words which will judge us (Jn. 12:48).

- (5) How can we expect to go to heaven without intimate knowledge of those words?!
- D. Some folks are always searching for a “magic bullet” when it comes to increasing their faith.
- (1) There is no “magic bullet” when it comes to increasing our faith! Rom. 10:17
- (2) God put the power of creating, sustaining and growing our faith in His word: Rom. 1:16
- 1 Cor. 1:18:** “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”
- 1 Thess. 2:13:** “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”
- 1 Pet. 2:2:** “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,”
- Heb. 4:12-13:** “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”
- (3) We can’t sit back and absorb God’s Word by osmosis! It doesn’t work that way!
- (4) We must be “diligent” in our Bible study!
- 2 Pet. 1:5, 10:** “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue...knowledge...self-control...perseverance...godliness...brotherly kindness... 10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;”
- Matt. 5:6:** “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”
- (5) If we put in the effort we will reap a great dividend:
- 1 Tim. 4:7-8:** “exercise yourself toward godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”
- Matt. 5:6:** “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”
- 1 Pet. 1:9:** “receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of your souls.”
- 2 Pet. 1:10-11:** “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
- E. Unless there are some dire circumstances, we need to be sure to involve ourselves in the Bible classes offered by the congregation on Sundays, Wednesdays, and any other opportunities that present themselves (e.g., gospel meetings, special studies).
- F. Consider starting a Bible study in your own home with your family, with friends, and with your neighbors; you name the place and time and I’ll be there!
- G. ** On the Day of Judgment will you: (1) Wish you had studied the Bible less? Or, (2) Wish you had studied the Bible more?

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2. 5 Neglect regular prayer:

- A. Prayer, like physical exercise, requires a daily regiment marked by discipline and determination (1 Tim. 4:7-8).

- B. Daily communication with God is an absolute necessity in maintaining spiritual strength.
- C. Both Jesus and Paul taught about the necessity of regular prayer:
- (1) Jesus taught that “*men always ought to pray and not lose heart*” (Lk. 18:1); but in the same passage he lamented the fact that most don’t pray as they should and He said “*when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth.*” (Lk. 18:8)
 - (2) Paul said, “*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*” (Phil. 4:6).
- D. We need to take a minute and contemplate just how fantastic prayer really is:
- (1) Prayer gives us the opportunity to directly communicate with God Almighty, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe!
 - (2) Not only that, but God *invites* us to pray; He has an *intense desire* to hear from us.
1 Jn. 5:14-15: “*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*”
 - (3) And, when He invites, He doesn’t require us to crawl on our hands and knees!
Heb. 4:16: “*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*”
 - (4) But for our prayers to be heard we must pray with all sincerity and contriteness of spirit:
Jer. 29:12-13: “*Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*”
1 Pet. 3:12: “*For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.*”
 - (5) God does hear our prayer and it has a positive effect (**Jas. 5:16-18:** “*...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.*”).
- E. When we pray we need to realize as we pray more than just our words and thoughts are going up to God’s ears:
Rom. 8:26: “*Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*”
Rom. 8:34: “*...Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*”
- F. We must make a determined effort to have more prayer in our lives, on an individual level, and when in the company of other Christians.
- (1) Husbands, encourage your family to have more prayer.
 - (2) Wives, encourage your husband to be engage more in family prayer, more prayer with husband and wife, more prayer when friends and family are over, etc.
- G. ** On the Day of Judgment will you: (1) Wish you had prayed less? Or, (2) Wish you had prayed more?

You might be backsliding if you're...

3. 6 Sporadic in your attendance at worship assemblies:

- A. Every assembly of the congregation, incl. midweek service, is a “worship service” to the Lord.
 - (1) These services should bring glory to God.
 - (2) They are a part of our “good works” we must perform to remain faithful:
 - Eph. 2:10:** “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”
 - Titus 3:8:** “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.”
- B. Our worship services are also designed to promote love, encouragement, and good works amongst one another:
 - Heb. 10:24:** “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,”
 - (1) The context of Hebrews 10 is the discussion of “if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth...” (v. 26).
 - (2) Notice what the Hebrew writer says concerning “if we sin willfully...”: **vv. 26-31**
 - (3) In the context of Hebrews 10 the example of the willful sin is “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...” (v. 25).
 - (4) This should make attendance something much more important than just because the preacher harps on it all the time...God wants us here! I Jn. 5:3
- C. To habitually and without valid reason absent ourselves from any of these assemblies is a sure sign of weakness and a possible sign of slow departure from the faith.
- D. The scripture says, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some is, but exhorting one another and so much the more, as you see the day drawing night” (Heb. 10:24-25).
 - (1) Maybe you’re strong enough not to need to meet regularly with the saints for encouragement.
 - (2) We need you’re here! Not to just check your name off of list; but the rest of us need the encouragement your presence at worship services provides.
 - (3) God wants you present too! He desires your fellowship!
- E. ** On the Day of Judgment will you: (1) Wish you had attended less worship services? Or, (2) Wish you had attended more worship services?

You might be backsliding if you have...

4. 7 Developed a critical spirit:

- A. A critical, judgmental spirit damages the Christian who is doing it and the congregation.
- B. It causes one to become overly concerned with others’ weaknesses without looking to your own weaknesses (Matt. 7:3).
- C. It has been my experience that Christians who fall away usually become very critical of their fellow Christians.
 - (1) I’m not saying any of us are above rebuke.

- (2) But most criticisms leveled by those falling away are really just “nit picking.”
- (3) They are using the faults and weaknesses of others in an effort to excuse their own unfaithfulness.
- (4) I’ve also found that many Christians who leave a congregation and place membership elsewhere often use similar excuses.
 - (a) It is so ironic; if your home congregation is doctrinally sound, why would you want to leave just because some of its members have weaknesses or things aren’t quite like you want them to be?
 - (b) Aren’t you aware of your own weaknesses and your obligation to help your fellow Christians overcome their weaknesses?

Matt. 7:3-5: *“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? 4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? 5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”*

- (c) If things are not to our liking we have an obligation to try to make things better.

Gal. 6:1-3: *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”*
- (d) Think of all the problems present at the “church of God at Corinth.”
 - (i) What would have happened if Paul had the attitude that so many do that hop from one congregation to another looking for that perfect situation?
 - (ii) If Paul had that attitude he would have washed his hands of them completely! And, what would have been the result?
- (e) Instead Paul showed longsuffering and patience; he labored tirelessly to help those brethren overcome their spiritual weaknesses!
 - (i) “longsuffering” is a “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22).
 - (ii) “longsuffering” is an essential attitude to achieve unity (**Eph. 4:1-3:** *“...beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*).
- (f) Paul said “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” (1 Cor. 11:1)
 - (i) When we are hypercritical of our brethren or run off and place membership elsewhere are we imitating Paul...imitating Christ?
 - (ii) Where would you and I be if Christ showed the same patience and longsuffering toward us that some brethren show toward us?

D. The weaker we allow ourselves to grow in the faith the more critical we tend to become toward our brethren’s “sins” and “weaknesses”; in turn there is a danger they will become more caustic toward us.

- (1) Jesus said, *“Judge not, that you be not judged, for with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you...”* (Matt. 7:1-5).

- (2) Backsliding people tend to more and more find fault in others, because it aids them in “justifying” their own weaknesses.
- (3) It’s easier to find fault in others; it’s easier to rationalize, “Well, how do you expect me to be faithful when there’s so much fault in everyone else.” (i.e., too many hypocrites!).
- (4) We need to reject that attitude and become like Barnabas (**Acts 4:36**: “...Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, Son of exhortation),” ASV).

I Thess. 5:14: “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.”

- E. While the Bible does teach Christians to “judge righteous judgment” (Jn. 7:24), it also teaches us to “...put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, ut and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” (Col. 3:12-13).
- F. ** On the Day of Judgment will you: (1) Wish you had been less longsuffering toward the brethren? Or, (2) Wish you had been more longsuffering toward the brethren?

You might be backsliding if you have...

5. 8 Apathy toward the lost:

- A. When we begin to backslide one of the first things that suffers is our zeal in general, and more specifically toward the lost (**Rom. 12:11**: “not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;”).
 - (1) Why would we be interested in the souls of others; after all our desire for all things spiritual is on the decline?
 - (2) Why would we be interested in the souls of others when our care for our own soul is on the decline?
- B. When such apathy seeps into our lives it is critical to remind ourselves:
 - (1) Of the value of the soul (**Matt. 16:26**: “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”).
 - (2) The certainty of judgment (**Rom. 14:10-12**: “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 11 For it is written: ‘As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ 12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”; **2 Cor. 5:10-11a**: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;”),
 - (3) The awesomeness of eternity; try to wrap your mind around “endless time” (**Matt. 25:46**: “...everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”; Mk. 9:43-48).
- C. On at least 14 occasions the Bible tells us Jesus was “moved with compassion” (e.g., Matt. 9:6; Mk. 1:41, etc.).
 - (1) If you had the opportunity to keep someone from stepping into the street and getting run over by a truck...what would you do?
 - (2) When we seek to teach a lost soul the gospel, or support those preaching the gospel, we are potentially saving folks from a far worse fate.
- D. ** On the Day of Judgment will you: (1) Wish you had done less to reach the lost? Or, (2) Wish you had done more to reach the lost?

You might be backsliding if you...

6. **9** Resent admonishment and exhortation:

- A. Those who are backsliding, unfortunately, begin to resent those who seek to admonish and exhort them (e.g., sermons like this one!).
- B. They become resentful of those who are looking to restore their souls (**Jas. 5:19-20:** “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”; Ezek. 33).
- C. I recognize there is a right way and a wrong way to exhort and admonish folks:
 - (1) Applicable to all situations (**Gal. 6:1:** “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”).
 - (2) Others need more forcible rebuke (**Jude 22-23:** “And on some have compassion, making a distinction; 23 but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.”; **Titus 1:13:** “rebuke them sharply”).
- D. Once we begin to “despise” correction and instruction we are in big, big trouble:
Prov. 3:11-12: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; 12 For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.”
- E. We must realize that “chastening” does us good: **Heb. 12:3-11**
- F. Billy Sunday once said: “The backslider likes the preaching that wouldn't hit the side of a house, while the real disciple is delighted when the truth brings him to his knees.”
- G. ****** On the Day of Judgment will you: (1) Wish you had listened less to admonishment and rebuke? Or, (2) Wish you had listened more to admonishment and rebuke?

III. CONCLUSION: **10**

- 1. If any of these or other problems exist in our life it may be because we are slowly but surely backsliding.
- 2. Most of those that I've known who were backsliding were miserable with their lives they have just enough religion to make them miserable, but not enough faith to experience the joy of fellowship with God.
 - A. “The trouble with many men is that they have got just enough religion to make them miserable.” (Billy Sunday)
 - B. If that's the case you need to see a doctor...seek the Great Physician!
Matt. 11:28-30: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”
- 3. Why not get back to salvation's road; to the road of spiritual wholeness?

(Adapted from a sermon entitled “Danger Signals of Backsliding,” author unknown.)