

Backsliding

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[0 : 00] Well, several years ago, my family went down to my parents' house for Christmas Day, and there was about two or three inches of ice on the road.

And when it came time to leave, I guess the first thing you need to know is my parents' driveway comes out at the bottom of a hill. And so in order to get out and get going home, you have to go up this really steep hill.

And with two or three inches of ice, it's very treacherous. Well, it came time for us to leave, and we took up off that hill, going up that hill.

And you have to have enough speed to get up the hill, but you can't have too much speed because if you do, there's a stop sign right up on the top of the hill, and you'll go right through it, and it'll be dangerous on the way down.

Well, to put it mildly, we had some difficulty. We got up going, but pretty soon our car came to a stop. We couldn't get any more traction, and we started sliding, sliding down that hill.

[1 : 11] And I think we did a spin on the way down. That was incredibly frightening. But whatever it was, at the end, there we were at the bottom of the hill, right where we had started, with as much ice and as much hill to go as we had begun.

We had literally backslidden. Today, we're going to talk about spiritually backsliding. But I think that's a good picture.

We make some progress, and yet now here we are. We're back down at the bottom. Backsliding is something that every Christian does, and there are ups and there are downs.

There's back and forth. Now we're hot. Now we're cold. But maybe you have backslidden. And you've let coldness and sin and carelessness come into your heart, come between you and God. And now you're starting to feel the effects of that. There's a cloud between you and God.

[2 : 26] There's doubt. And there's fear. And there's guilt. God is not pleased with you. And you know that, and you are beginning to feel it.

And you say, that's why I'm so downcast. Because I let myself get here. I am here. I'm not making progress.

I feel so cold. Shouldn't I be discouraged? Shouldn't I be downcast? That's what we've been talking about on these Sunday afternoons, is we have opportunity, is why are you so downcast, oh my soul?

And we've been looking at a variety of scenarios, different problems that people have, and how we get there. And so this is one of them. Shouldn't I be downcast?

I'm backslidden. Not only am I not making progress, I'm actually further behind on this Christian journey. I'm not closer to God.

[3 : 30] I'm further away. I'm not being more obedient, more holy. In fact, it's the exact opposite. And that's why I'm discouraged. And shouldn't I be? Well, let me say this. You should be sad.

You should be grieving. But you shouldn't be downcast, discouraged, without hope. You should grieve, but you shouldn't grieve like someone that has no hope.

There's a difference. And maybe you know you're backslidden, and you want help. You're discouraged, and you want to get back to where you were. You want that fire.

You want that first love. You want to experience. You want to be closer to God. And if that's you, and you know that, and you're discouraged, I have encouragement for you today. I have encouragement for you. But maybe you're backslidden, and you don't care.

Do I have any encouragement for you? If it doesn't bother you, and you're liking your sin, then I don't have any encouragement for you.

[4 : 37] You're grieving the Holy Spirit. You're ignoring the Lord Jesus. You are mocking God. And so what encouragement could I give you?

The Bible, the way the Bible addresses people who are backslidden and don't care, is with a warning. This is just one of those places.

This is from Hebrews. Land that drinks in the rain, often falling on it, and produces a useful crop, receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed.

In the end, it will be burned. So God has poured out his blessing on you. Spiritual blessing, spiritual rain. And my question is, what are you doing with it?

So, this is a word to us as Christians. Hebrews was written to Christians, professing Christians. And so it's appropriate to say, have you received the blessing of God?

[5 : 52] Now, what are you doing? What are you producing? So it's a word to Christians. It's a word to those who have not repented and believed. Because you too have experienced the blessing of God.

If you're here, you've heard the gospel that saves. The grace of our Lord is not something that you've never heard of or understood. You've heard the gospel.

So what are you doing at? What kind of crop are you producing? God is pouring out blessing. Are you producing thorns and thistles? Well, the Bible is not encouraging about that.

Instead, there's a warning. So where are you? If you're back slid in and you're wanting to get back, well, how do you get out of the sadness?

How do you get out of the discouragement? If you don't like being here, how do you get happy again in the Lord? How do you get out? Well, Jeremiah chapter 3 and 4 has the answer.

[6 : 50] So I'm going to ask you to turn there. Jeremiah chapter 3 and 4. And it talks to people who are just like you if you're back slid in. And they're sad.

And they're grieving. And they have the frown of God on their lives. And the Lord is not and done with them. So how do you get out of the sadness and the grief of backsliding?

And the sermon breaks up into just two parts. The first is there's a promise. And then there's something to do. And so first, here's a promise for you.

Here's a promise for you. Jeremiah 3, verse 22. Jeremiah 3, verse 22. Return.

Return, faithless people. I will cure you of your backsliding. That's a promise. And that's a promise for you. Specifically, God is talking to his ancient people, Judah.

[7 : 50] Earlier in chapter 3, he told the story of these two sisters. And they're both unfaithful. The first was Israel. And the second is Judah. And Judah had watched Israel go into exile.

And he thought, the Lord says, I thought you would have seen that and then would have returned to me. But they hadn't. And now the days are running out.

Now the time is running out for Judah. And God's very serious word to them is return.

You see it in chapter 1 and 2 and 3 and 4. That's the main idea. Return. And now in verse 22, he gives them and he gives us a promise. So if you felt like your heart is cold and hard and you want to give back to the Lord and you're not here, here you are backslidden.

Here's a promise for you. Return and I will cure you of your backsliding. Now here's why you don't have to be discouraged or downcast.

[8 : 55] This is why it's okay to be sad, but I don't want you to be so discouraged that you don't do anything. The Lord is saying, even after all you've done, if you return to me, I will cure you.

I'm a doctor. That's what the Lord says. We call Jesus the great physician. He cured physical bodies. But he also cures backsliding souls.

And that's the promise God is holding out to you. God isn't standing in heaven with his arms crossed. Tapping his toe. Just waiting for us to, waiting for you to get your act together.

That's not his posture. His posture rather is that of a doctor. With his arms wide open. Saying, return and I'll cure you.

So you've stormed out of the doctor's office. And now the doctor is standing at the door. Saying, come on, come back. And I'll cure you. Return and I'll cure you.

[10 : 07] Now, does that say that God loves his people or not? Doesn't that say that God loves you? He says, yes, I want to cure you of that backsliding.

I want to heal this relationship. I want to heal your soul. And so he promises to cure you. And now curing means forgiving you. That's partly what it means. He says, return and I'll forgive you.

I won't hold your sins against you. I won't hold them up locked in my heart. God isn't like that. To say, I'm going to keep some of these sins. And I'm going to keep them fresh for another day. And when the time is right, I'll bring them out against you once again.

God is saying, no, I'll remember your sins no more. Now, do we do that sometimes where we hold a grudge and we keep people's sins in our heart and we just wait for the day for that to happen? And we really don't forgive them.

We still hold it against them. Well, God is saying, if you return to me, I'll cure you. Backsliding is like gangrene or some sort of disease.

[11:09] And God says, I'm going to wash it all away. Cleanse it. I'll wash it away and remember it no more. But curing also means really healing you.

Really healing you of that backsliding. You know, if you go to a doctor and sometimes have you ever broken an arm or something like that and they have to set the bone.

Well, why do they have to set the bone? Because if they don't, the bone is not going to grow straight. And so God is here saying, you know, I can cure you of your backsliding.

And what he does is he sets those bones back in place and gets them growing in the right direction again. They're growing off now. He can put them back.

I'll set that bone. I'll get you growing in the right direction again. That's what God is promising. Life. Flourishing. Health.

[12:09] Spiritual health. And so don't be discouraged. Grieve for your sin. But don't just stand there and do nothing.

Don't let. But let your grief drive you to God for healing. You know, there is a kind of a hypocritical grief. Where you're sad about your sin.

But you still stay in it. You're just not. You're sad that you're suffering it or you're experiencing it. But yet you don't want to give it up. There is a kind of hypocritical grief where you grieve for your sin. But then you stay away from God who can cure you.

And the Lord is saying, return to me and I'll cure you. I'll really heal you. And you will. So that's a promise for you.

[13:05] There you are. If you're backslidden and you're cold and you're hard, hardened. You've lost your first love and you know it. And you want to return. Jeremiah 3.22 The Lord says, return and I'll cure you of your backsliding.

Now that's the first thing. There's a promise for you. Now secondly, here's something for you to do to be happy again. If you're discouraged and your soul is downcast, this is something for you to do in order to be happy again.

And so first I have to ask you, do you want to be happy again? Do you want to be happy again? Jesus sometimes asks a funny question.

I don't know if you've ever noticed it. It's a very peculiar question, but someone would come to him and they were sick or they were injured or they had some need. And he would ask them, do you want to be well?

Now what kind of question is that? But you know why Jesus is asking that question? It's because sometimes people who are sick really don't want to be well.

[14:19] Somehow it's become so much a part of them that they get some sort of perverse pleasure out of it or it becomes so much a part of our identity that we don't want to get better. And so Jesus would ask them, is this what you really want?

Do you want to be well? And that's why I'm asking you, do you want to be happy again? Because it's going to cost you something.

You can't stay where you are and be happy. It's going to demand that you do something. And that's what we are going to talk about. But if you do, if you want to be happy again, if your soul is backslidden and you want to be happy again, here's something for you to do.

Chapter 4, verse 1. Chapter 4, verse 1. If you will return, O Israel, return to me. If you will return, O Israel, return to me.

Now he's saying, if you want to return, then really do it. Really do it. In chapter 3, verse 10, I want you to look at that verse because, again, this is all talking about returning.

[15:26] In chapter 3, verse 10. In spite of all of this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretense.

She had the appearance of returning. It was just in words of returning. And they said they wanted to return and they made some half-hearted efforts to returning to the Lord.

But it was really just for show. It was just a pretense. Just for ten. Just for show. They didn't really want to return. They wanted their sins. They wanted to keep doing what they wanted to keep doing. And now God is saying, if you will return, then return to me. Really return. Not in word. Not half-hearted. 110%. Gung-ho. Gazelle intense. All the way. Return. And if you do, you'll be happy again.

[16:27] You want to throw off that discouragement and downcastness? Then return. And you will be happy. And you can ask any Christian who's really backslidden and then returned.

Ask them. Ask them. How do you feel now that you've returned to the Lord? They will never ever say, oh, I'm still sad. I'm still discouraged. No, now they're saying, oh, this is great.

Right? There's no describing the joy. You know, it's like being away from God. It's like being in a dark, dirty, smelly, death-filled cave.

That's what it is for our souls. And when you return, you walk out of the cave and you walk out into the light. You walk into the love of God whose love is better than life itself.

And so there's joy. No one ever returns to God and is worse for it. So return. Return means dealing with your sins.

[17:35] Really dealing with your sins. Not making excuses. Not being okay with them. But actually really definitively doing something about them. That's the rest of chapter 4, verse 1.

If you put your detestable idols out of my sight. That's what it means to return. You put the detestable idols away.

You get rid of them. So when Moses came down from Mount Sinai and saw the golden calf, do you remember what he did to it?

He smashed it. He ground it up. He threw it into the water. He made the people drink it. He totally got rid of it.

Do you remember what Gideon did to his father's Asherah pole? The town Asherah pole, I think. Well, he got an axe out and he chopped it down.

[18:33] So what I'm saying is, what does it look like to return? It's like being like Moses.

Smashing the idol. It's like being like Gideon. Cutting down the idol. And what I want to say is, as you start swinging the axe at those idols.

They're going to scream and they're going to cry and they're not going to like it. But as you start swinging, just see if your heart doesn't begin to rise up with joy.

Just see if your heart doesn't get filled up with joy. You know, you weren't made. I talked about this this morning.

We weren't made for these little idols. Our hearts weren't made for these filthy little idols. You were made, your soul, your heart was made for a glorious God.

[19:32] And whose love is better than life. And so when you return, that means dealing with those idols. Really putting your foot on the neck and killing them.

And being done with them. Returning also means doing what is right. Doing what is right. Cain. Cain.

His offering wasn't accepted. And Cain experienced two emotions. You can read about it in Genesis chapter 4. He experienced anger.

But then it also says he was downcast. He was angry. He was very sad. Discouraged. Do you remember what the Lord said to him?

He said, Cain, if you do what is right. Won't you be accepted? If you do what is right. God was showing Cain.

[20:40] The doorway. To happiness. To acceptance. To joy. To fellowship with him. He was saying. Cain, there it is. If you do what is right. If you do what is right.

You'll go through that door and you won't be angry and you won't be miserable anymore. And Jeremiah is doing the same for Judah. In the book of Jeremiah is doing the same for us.

Do you want to crawl out of your misery? Begin doing what is right. Break up your unplowed ground.

Break up your unplowed ground. And so here's your life. It's like a field. And it's unplowed. What's an unplowed field producing?

Nothing. Really. Weeds, I guess. But it's not producing any sort of crop. It's a field. But it's all unplowed. It's not producing anything. And so I want to ask you.

[21 : 44] Look at your life. What is it producing? Is it fruitless? It's not producing anything good.

Anything pleasing to the Lord. Jeremiah's word is. Plow up that field. Break it up. And that means. Get it ready for planting. Get ready.

Start growing something. Get to work at that farm. And start producing something. Do what is right. Circumcise your heart. Give God your hearts. And that's what it comes down to.

When we give our hearts to idols. Like Jeremiah. Or like the people in Jeremiah's day did. They make us miserable. They make us unfruitful.

But when you give your heart to the Lord. He makes you happy. So how do you get out of this discouragement?

[22 : 49] How do you get out of this downcast state of being backslidden? Well. Return to the Lord. He'll cure you.

Do what is right. Get rid of your idols. Give God your heart.

You've been giving your heart to something else. Yeah. So give God your heart instead. And when you do that. If idols make you miserable.

Again. I want to say the Lord. Can make you happy. Joyful. The clouds will roll back. And you have fellowship. And you have friendship with God.

You. You don't have to stay. In the condition that you're in. Satan wants you to stay in that condition. Because you're completely. Unfruitful.

[23 : 47] Weak. But you don't have to stay there. And but. So if you're backslidden. Return to God. He'll cure you. If you're lost.

You know. The same promise is for you. God says return. Return to me. You know. There was that. That prodigal son. And he was in the pigsty.

And he was hungry. And he was miserable. And what he needed to do. To be happy again. Is to get up. And go back to his father. And Jesus says.

That's what I'm like. I'm the father. That's waiting for my sons to return. And I throw my arms around you. And I'll love you forever. Return to me. And I'll make you happy forever. After that son returned.

Then the party began. Then the celebration started. And that's what God is. That's his promise. Jesus didn't come into your life. Jesus didn't come into this world.

[24 : 45] To ruin your life. Children listen to me. Young people listen to me. Jesus didn't come. Into the world. To ruin people's lives.

He came that they might have life. And to the fullest. Not that they would be sad. And discouraged. And downcast. But they would have joy.

With their father in heaven. He came that you might have life. And have it to the full. And so the thing for you to do. Is to return. Come to God. Leave your sin.

Believe in him. Give yourself to him once again. And that's the pathway. To encouragement. And happiness. Well let's pray. Heavenly father.

We thank you. That there is this promise. That if we will return to you. You will cure us. And we. Each know. That we can. Stumble.

[25 : 42] And grow cold. And decline. Spiritually. And so we thank you. For this word. And this promise. That. Shows us the way back. And gives us hope. If we will come back.

And thank you. For this word. That shows us. And tells us. What we should be doing. That returning. Is not just doing nothing. But returning. Is actively. Returning to you.

And putting away our idols. So. I would pray. That you would. Give us. That desire. Each and every one of us. To be close to you. To be near to you. Not only give us the desire.

But then give us the help. To. To do what is right. Thank you. Holy Spirit. That you. That you. Are the one who is with us. You feed us.

When we're hungry. You shine upon us. With the love of God. And I pray. For each of my brothers. And sisters. And I pray. Especially for those who.

[26 : 41] Feel so dead inside. Spiritually. And maybe. It's. Because they've sinned. And they've been careless. I pray that you.

Would make them to hear. Your voice. Telling them to return. Please encourage us. As we go on our way. I ask this in Jesus name. And really for his sake. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.