

Better not Drift Away

Hebrews 2:1-4

*No matter how long you've been walking with Jesus, perhaps you can identify with **Frank & Mary**.

*Frank and Mary wrote to me recently about deep levels of relational pain over the years caused a dark season of isolation where they were on the verge of spiritually drifting.

***Shared with their permission**, Frank and Mary's letter gives an honest and helpful evaluation of a scenario that is all too common and causes many people to spiritually drift:

*"We were in a place of limbo...situations seemed unfair...hurts we couldn't resolve. We did not know how to process it. Many doubts came to mind. This [relational hurts in the church] was a major cause of why we **almost walked away...almost ended up in the heap of brokenness that many find themselves in.***

*But, we're followers of Christ! We look at questions as an opportunity to process how faith will push through doubt. So through many tears, raised voices, and some spiritual warfare we began to **biblically counsel one another in a restorative way**, asking:*

- *Why do we go to church?*
- *Why do we go to this church?*
- *How important is knowing and following His Word?*
- *Can we actually forgive so-and-so?*
- *What is there to learn in and through this?*
- *Can we stand on the Chief Cornerstone even if all else crumbles?*
- *Will leaving actually solve anything?*
- *How can we trust Him like never before?*

*Hebrews is written with a pastoral concern for the Frank and Mary's of our world.

*2,000 years ago, people had left old ways of sin and had come to faith in Jesus. They were growing in their faith, for weeks/months, but in time they had reached a dangerous point.

*Something very noticeable had shifted in their relationship with the Lord.

***Casual**. They seemed to have lost their passion and were becoming way too casual.

***Neglect**. They seemed to waver from their love of Jesus and were neglecting Him.

***Drift**. They seemed to have lost their moorings and were beginning to drift to old ways

*With the heart of a pastor, Paul writes to the Frank and Mary's of the faith to **exalt Jesus** as better...and **solemnly warn believers** about the dangerous direction of spiritual drift.

*This book, written to Jewish people 2,000 years ago, is still a relevant and needed message today.

*Our region of **lakes and wineries** is full of Frank and Mary's who are in a heap of brokenness.

*Our region, according to a Barna study, is the **14th most dechurched region** in the country.

*Many young people (**age 25-34**) at one time **grew up in some form of faith**, only to walk away and drift down dark paths of isolation.

*Then there is the middle ages (**ages 35-54**) some of whom are married, ½ of whom are single, divorced or mixed families who in spite of having a form of faith have **drifted from Christ**.

*Then there is the retired crowd (**ages 65-74**) who **once began a relationship with Jesus** only to allow **wealth and leisure** to choke out matters of faith.

*My friend, we are in a time known as **The Great Resignation** and **The Great Relocation** where many people have not only quit jobs but have also quit a strong commitment to Christ and the church.

*That's the type of culture to whom Hebrews is written, urging them to remain faithful to Christ.

1. **Beware drifting from Jesus,** (v.1)

*Therefore we must pay **much closer attention** to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*

*The **1st solemn warning of Hebrews** is a warning about the dangers of spiritual drift.

*The people receiving this letter were no different from us. In spite of having begun a walk of faith, they were facing circumstances that were causing them to drift.

*Perhaps Jesus had not met their expectations.

*Perhaps the church or fellow believers had disappointed them.

*Perhaps the old ways of life were calling them back.

*Whatever the cause, Paul writes a strong warning urging them to remain vigilant in faith.

"Spiritual Drift" defined: *"Slow, almost imperceptible movements away from relationship with Jesus and His church which over time leads to isolation and ruin if left uncorrected."*

***My heart to yours:** nothing **brings more joy** to pastors than watching people grow in faith and **nothing brings more sorrow** than watching people **drift into ruin**.

*Every pastor I know agonizes when people TRIP over their faith shoelaces

*"You were running well. Who **hindered** you [**CUT IN** on you; **TRIPPED** you] from obeying the truth?"*
(Gal 5:7-8)

T.R.I.P.P.E.D: *The Causes of Drifting*

T – Taking offense

R – Recurring sin

I – Isolating from community

P – Painful church experience

P – Poor accountability

E – Excuses, excuses

D – Disappointment with God

Be Warned: *Every Christian is susceptible to the dangers of spiritual drift.*

- *Either you already drifted...the call is to return.*
- *Or you are beginning to drift...the call is to stop & consider the direction you are headed.*
- *Or you will soon be tempted to drift...the call is to be prepared to stay faithful.*

Be Aware: *The primary cause of spiritual drift is emotional pain caused by relational offense.*

Action Step: **Forgive the pain of offense, or you may drift from Jesus.**

*23 years of ministry makes me no expert, but as one who observes human nature and has experienced a fair share of relational pain, it seems evident that the starting point of most spiritual drift is offense.

*It is **quite a paradox**: The greatest joys and sorrows of life can both be experienced within the same community of people.

***Did you know**: At the height of COVID – October 2020 – weary of **relational drama & organizational fatigue** - I wrote a retirement letter and never turned it in?

*I read the letter again this week – a well written letter I might add – and realized that there are 3 primary reasons I have withstood **relational rip tides**:

The grace of God; the call of ministry (a calling not a career); the vow of stability to His (this) church.

*Strong resolution to Jesus is needed to withstand the rip currents of relational pain.

*What keeps you from drifting? What keeps you on course?

2. ...because it is no small matter, (v.2-3a)

*“For since **the message** declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”*

*Paul pleads with believers to **look down the road**, showing them the **dangerous direction**:

Drifting: A Dangerous Direction

- **Word** is sent. (God sends His message to humanity, which is reliable & trustworthy)
- **Warnings** are neglected. (In spite of hearing the word, people choose to neglect it)
- **Wayward** taste consequences. (*How shall we escape if we neglect?*)

*How shall we escape? He seems to be saying that those who neglect the Word and drift from a relationship with Jesus will **not escape consequences** of doing life apart from Him.

*IOW: He sees **early warning signs of drifting** and wants them to look down the road 10 weeks, 10 months, 10 years to see that the **final destination** is no small matter.

***Pastoral sensitivity prevents me from telling you stories...**but let me assure you: the consequences of those who drift from Jesus and neglect His word often leads to personal ruin.

C.O.L.L.A.P.S.E: Consequences of Drifting

C – Church disengagement

O – Operating in the flesh

L – Loss of community

L – Leisure becomes priority

A – Agenda of Self (my kingdom, not His; not building His body)

P – Prayer life diminishes

S – Shifting Blame

E – Emotional disaster

Action Step: Ponder the consequences of neglect, or you may taste ruin.

*Are you in the **early stages of drifting?** The best time to address it is now.

*Are you **neglecting** the word of God you once believed? It is wise to consider where it leads

***Listen to Proverbs 19:3, in the Message:**

“People ruin their lives by their own stupidity, so why does God always get blamed?”

*My friend: that verse could be on **the Tombstone** of many who once walked with Jesus

*The **1st warning of Hebrews** echoes through the ages to the land of North MI, pleading with people not to drift from their love of Jesus because it’s a dangerous destination.

3. ...and His gospel is too important! (v.3b-4)

"It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

*It's a summary reminder to the believers of how the gospel started and why it's important.

*It, "the message", was **first declared by Jesus**, who promised He would build His church.

*The 12 disciples were the ones who heard...although one disciple drifted into utter ruin...and after the resurrection those disciples passed the message along to others (like this author)

*They heard and believed...and passed it along to others who heard and believed...and 2,000 years later, this gospel has changed the lives of millions around the globe.

*How is it possible? The Holy Spirit not only filled the hearts of those who follow Jesus, but also gives each one gifts (service, helps, leadership, mercy, etc...) intended to build up the church.

*His point? The gospel not only changes our lives, but is a message to be lived out in community.

*That is a message we must not drift from...and is too important to neglect.

Action Step: Resist the schemes of Satan, or you may become dechurched.

*As we listen to the warning of Hebrews 2, we are reminded to return to the community of faith

*We can hear urgency in the warnings...and feel a call to return from drifting.

R.E.T.U.R.N.: Corrections to Drifting

R – Remember your 1st love

E – Expect opposition

T – Turn back to church

U – Use your gifts

R – Recommit to small group

N – Need to forgive

*The spiritual battle should not surprise us. We are in a battle where our adversary seeks to discourage believers by sowing seeds of discord.

Frank & Mary "almost ended up in a heap of brokenness...but they remained resilient in faith:

*Coming **very close** to being a part of the **unchurched/dechurched** has helped to give us empathy for just how much He loves His Body, His Bride. And while He is still working in and through healing us, we know a little more of His great love and grace for us, and others, and this church."*

Action Step Summary:

Forgive the pain of offense, or you may drift from Jesus.

Ponder the consequences of neglect, or you may taste ruin.

Resist the schemes of Satan, or you may become dechurched.