

# Danger of Drifting

by Stephen Olford

---

*The sermon warns against the danger of drifting in the Christian life, emphasizing the importance of discipline, attention, and obedience to God's voice to avoid the consequences of drifting.*

**Duration:** 35:35

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 1:1-2, Hebrews 2:1-4, Hebrews 4:11, Hebrews 6:4-6, Hebrews 10:25, Hebrews 12:11

**Topics:** "Drifting"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of preventing spiritual drifting. He starts by illustrating the consequences of drifting by recounting the story of David and Bathsheba, where lust led to adultery and murder. The speaker then shifts to the New Testament and highlights the example of Peter, who initially had a deep spiritual revelation but later drifted away. The main message is that as preachers and missionaries, it is crucial to give earnest heed to the teachings of Jesus and not drift away from them. The speaker emphasizes that God's final word to the world is in his son, Jesus Christ.

---

## Transcript

I've been thinking of a general theme of towards spiritual maturity, starting this morning with the theme of the danger of drifting. And I want you to turn with me, against the background of that very wonderful hymn we've just sung, to the epistle to the Hebrews, the epistle to the Hebrews. And we'll read just those first four verses of chapter 2. Chapter 2 of the epistle to the Hebrews.

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. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him? God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost. According to his own will.

Dear Lord, we look to thee that thou wilt by thy Holy Spirit take this passage and interpret it to us, apply its principles, and grant us the grace, by the indwelling of that same Holy Spirit, to implement the lessons we shall learn in daily living. Speak then in the stillness of this morning chapel hour, to every one of our hearts, for thy dear name's sake. Amen.

The people to whom this epistle was addressed were under tremendous pressure. The temptation was strong to move from Christianity, to which they were committed, back to Judaism. And this chapter is one of the first of seven warnings found throughout this epistle concerning this matter of backsliding.

Here the writer gives us this process of backsliding under the thought of drifting, the concept of drifting. For literally, that second verse, or first verse rather, and the end of the verse reads, lest at any time we should drift away. It's a nautical term.

It's the picture of a boat that hasn't been anchored properly, and because of the strength of the current is taken past the point of anchorage, and drifts away to the rocks. Lest at any time we should drift away. I suppose this is one of the greatest dangers in the Christian life.

Drifting. And I want us very briefly this morning to think of four senses in which the writer here speaks of drifting. First of all, the possibility of drifting in the Christian life.

The possibility of drifting in the Christian life. Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we've heard, lest or possibly we should drift away. Lest possibly we should at any time drift away.

The more I've thought about this and the more I've meditated upon this passage, the more it's become apparent to me of the fact that this can first of all easily happen. The possibility of drifting, it can easily happen. Lest at any time we should drift away.

Imperceptibly first of all, but definitely moving from the point of anchorage, before we know it finding ourselves way out in the wild sea, or down the swift current. This can so easily happen that the scriptures are just punctuated with illustrations of this kind of thing, all through the Old Testament into the New Testament. I've thought of four instances that we might just look at in thought.

Think of the life of Lot, the man who was called a righteous man, in New Testament language a committed Christian. And I don't suppose in the first instance he had the thought, the remotest thought, other than being associated and identified with the sin and wickedness and filthiness of Sodom and Gomorrah, leave alone its judgment. But you can follow his drift as you read the story in the Old Testament, Genesis 13 onwards, how he pitched his tent first of all towards Sodom.

Carelessness. And then he went into Sodom and lived in Sodom. Wealthiness.

And then finished up by sitting in the gate of Sodom. Sinfulness. Identified with a life.

The drift of the soul. Turn over the pages of scripture and we read about Samson. Samson was a Nazarite, a consecrated man.

A man who'd growled his hair long, taken vows upon himself that he shouldn't touch any unclean thing, that he should walk a separated life. And while he lived in the good of a consecrated life, entombed with heaven, he was a strong man. He rent a young lion as a kid.

He took the jawbone of an ass and slew a thousand men. He carried the gates of Gaza upon his shoulders when men tried to encompass him and lock him in. And yet as we read that story, a drift began in his life, first of all imperceptibly, started first of all with an unholy contact.

He ate honey from the carcass of the lion. He was committed to touch no unholy thing, nothing dead. That led to an unholy companionship.

He loved a woman by the name of Delilah. Because of that friendship, the drift continued to a very unwise conversation. When he looked into the face of this woman who had seduced him, hypnotized him, until he said, If I were shaven, then my strength would be as other men.

The drift of the soul. And the man who could stand with such strength and nobility and purity became a weak man. He lost his vision, his sight was gone.

He lost his strength. He lost his service. He ground corn for the Philistines.

The drift of the soul. Take the life of David, a man after God's own heart, a man whose supreme ambition was to live in the will of God. This singer, this shepherd, this king, whose greatest joy was to walk with his God.

And yet you know, a drift started in his soul, first of all imperceptibly, started with indolence. He should have been out at the front of the battle on one occasion, but instead he was lazy. With that indolence, immorality.

He watched a woman take a bath. He looked too long and lust conceived. And sin was born in his heart, and that led to adultery, and on top of it, infamy, murder.

The drift of the soul. It can easily happen. Come into the New Testament and look at the life there, the life of Peter.

One of my great and favorite characters. I love Peter. There's so much of Peter that represents my life.

But I see the drift of the soul. Here is a man who could stand and voice the expression of deep spiritual revelation. Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? And out from the depths of his soul, he said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Flesh and blood hasn't revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven, said the Lord Jesus Christ. This isn't something you've just learned academically. This is a deep spiritual revelation, Peter.

He had reached the heights of the revelation of the deity and Messiahship of Jesus. But in that very same chapter, the 16th chapter of Matthew, we begin to see the drift of the soul. It started with a self-centered carnality.

For when the Lord Jesus began to speak of his death, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem, you remember how Peter rebuked the Savior and said, Far be it from thee, far be it from thee. And Jesus had to turn around to this man who had uttered one of the greatest concessions we find in the Jew testament and say, Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but that be of men. Self-centered carnality.

You're not prepared for the cross. You want it easy. You're not prepared to go the way of the cross.

And that self-centered carnality led to a self-centered sufficiency. You remember, I won't leave you, Lord, though everybody else forsake you, I will lay down my life for you. And that eventually, through that despicable self-centered disloyalty, on the eve of the cross, he denied his Lord with oaths and curses.

I know not the man. When the Savior looked upon him, he went out and wept bitterly. I don't believe that any man crashes without this process of drifting.

It isn't a matter of instantaneous temptation and collapse. The drift of the soul begins way back somewhere. The drift of the soul, first of all imperceptibly, it's not only something that can easily happen, it actually happens, lest possibly we drift away.

Somebody has described drifting as the easiest and quickest and most delightful way of dying. We lie back on a pond and boat, or one of these pumped-up tires, and it's glorious just to drift, drift, drift, until suddenly we're beyond redemption point. We're in danger.

We can't get back unless some outside power brings us back. The drift of the soul. Let me ask you a question.

Are you drifting? Are you If you are conscious of the forces of self and sin and Satan, and there is a sense in which a real battle is raging, not in the sense of striving, but in the sense of opposition within and without, rejoice! Rejoice! And keep the bow of that boat of yours against the current. But if this morning you're conscious of nothing whatsoever in the way of opposition, the devil isn't against you, self isn't against you, sin isn't against you, and there's a laziness about your life, an indiscipline about your life, and in every sense of the word, you're drifting, drifting away, then my friend, you're in danger. You're in danger.

The drift of the soul. How, says the Apostle, therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time, lest possibly we drift away. With the possibility of drifting, I want us to move quickly into what I'm calling the process of drifting.

The process of drifting, lest at any time we should drift away. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? The whole process of drifting is bound up in that word neglect. Three times that word occurs in the New Testament, once right here, another time in Paul's letter to Timothy, and the third time in the Gospel.

Taken in the order in which I believe we do drift, let us look at them for a moment. All drifting starts with indiscipline. All drifting starts with indiscipline.

This is a form of drifting which comes through laziness, laziness. Paul, writing, Paul writing to, to Timothy says, neglect not the gift that is given to thee, that was given to thee by the laying on of hands of the presbytery. Don't let your gift, don't let your gift go to pieces by sheer indiscipline.

God has given you a gift. Develop it, develop it, work on it. See to it that in no way is it wrapped up in that napkin and buried, like the slothful lazy man of a parable.

My friends, I want to say here this morning that although I believe with all my heart that when the Savior comes into a man's life, there is a glorious rest of faith by which we count upon the indwelling Christ to do in us and through us what we can never achieve of ourselves. It's a very interesting thing that in chapter four of Hebrews, where the writer speaks of the rest of faith, he goes right on to say, let us labor therefore, strive to enter into that rest. And every one of you is given a gift, and every one of you is given a life that should be disciplined for God.

And one of the greatest words we need to bring back into our vocabulary today is that of discipline, discipline in our prayer, discipline in our work, discipline in our play, discipline in our leisure, discipline in

every area of life. It's an interesting thing that every one of the great experiences of Christian life are marked by a word of discipline. How do you start the Christian life? How do you start the Christian life? Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus.

Strive to enter in. That word is agonized, to enter in. You will never drift, never drift into the kingdom of heaven.

Drift is always from right to wrong, always from light to darkness, always from victory to defeat. No one ever drifted into heaven. No one ever drifted into life, purity, and joy, and purpose in Christ.

Strive to enter in. How do we live the Christian life? How do we live the Christian life? Labor that we may be found accepted of him. Diligent in your ambition, as one version reads it.

How do we study the Christian life? Study to show thyself approved unto God. You know that word. Be diligent.

How do we win the Christian life? Fight the good fight of faith, the same Greek word as the first one. Strive to win the Christian faith. Fight the good fight of faith.

If these words are not found in my vocabulary, strive, labor, study, fight and drifting, and drifting. It starts with indiscipline. Indiscipline inevitably moves into what I'm calling inattention.

And that's the very word used here in this passage. Therefore we ought to give the most more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the words spoken by angels were steadfast in every transgression and disobedience, received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect? Inattention is neglect through carelessness.

Indiscipline is neglect through laziness. This is carelessness, inattention. And anyone in this place knows what I'm talking about.

When no longer does the voice of God speak to you in your quiet times, you can sit through a lecture with absolute inattention. There is no grip upon your spirit. Somehow or other you've lost the grip of things.

You can listen to words and let them pass through your ears. Inattention. Dr. Fleece and I were talking yesterday about a missionary who told of an occasion when utterly exhausted and weary with her missionary work, she lay back in a hammock, and presently she was drowsy, sinking into sleep.

And even as she was going into sleep, she heard that horrible sound of one of those flies known as the tsetse fly, which injects a serum which develops that horrible disease known as sleeping sickness or complaint sleeping sickness, which can kill a man. Because of the drowsiness and in a sense delightfulness of that hammock, she didn't want to disturb herself, to rise and defend herself. This is what happens.

Inattention. That's why birds can habituate themselves to the peals of bells so that they never hear them. That's why people who live in the Niagara Falls area say they never hear the falls.

They become used to them. And alas, alas, that goes on to what is known, yes, in Christian experience as total indifference. Yes, indifference.

And that word is found in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 22 in the story of the marriage of the king's son. That great supper that was spread for the marriage of the king's son. And the king sent out, you remember, invitations, and some of the guests ungraciously refused the invitations, and here is the word, and made light of it.

Our English phrase there, made light of it, is the same word neglected it. And we're in the most dangerous position of all, young people here this morning, the most dangerous position of all, when we've come to a place where we make light of spiritual things. When we make light of the solemn words that are spoken to us.

When we shrug off the challenge that comes sweeping from the throne to our hearts. When there is an indifference about spiritual things. Tell me again, are you drifting? We've looked at the possibility of it.

We've looked at the process of it. There is such a thing as the drift of the soul. There is such a thing that is mainly on my heart to speak about this morning as we bring this message to a close is what I'm calling the penalty of it.

The penalty of it. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? How shall we escape? The answer of course is that there is no escape. There is no escape.

For a man who by indiscipline and inattention and indifference is continuing to drift, there is no escape. And the writer to the Hebrews shows that there is a just recompense of reward, first of all for transgression and then for disobedience. One the positive, the other the negative aspects of the sin of drifting.

That into which drifting brings us. Look at the transgression first of all, the recompense of transgression. Transgression was the violation of the law of God in Old Testament times and indeed in New Testament times.

Transgression merited the curse of God in those days, the cutting off of the communion of God with his people and the opening of the door into all manner of miseries and evil and penalties. Somebody says, can this happen under grace? Indeed it can. Nobody, nobody can tell me that God condemns sin under law but condones sin under grace.

Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead indeed unto sin live any longer therein? Sin is the transgression of the law. It's lawlessness.

That's New Testament language. And, says the apostle, there is a sin unto death. And you won't pray for it, for even prayer will not avail when a man has set his way to drift.

God will meet him at the judgment seat of Christ. He'll be saved so is by fire. He'll stand stripped of everything at the judgment seat of Christ and without a shame have to answer for a life of utter wastefulness.

He'll be saved, so is by fire, but he'll suffer death. Either the death of being utterly barren and useless here upon earth or of being cut off like an Ananias or a Sapphira or the brethren and sisters at Corinth who because of their indiscipline, because of their inattention, because of their indifference, was sleeping. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh it away.

Every branch that abideth not in me is cast forth and is withered. The penalty of drifting. The recompense of transgression, there is a recompense of disobedience.

That received a just reward too. And if transgression is the violation of the law of God, disobedience is the refusal to hear the voice of God when God is calling, danger ahead, danger ahead, you're drifting. You go on drifting.

And what happened in olden days? Well, the story is told us in the fourth of Hebrew, the third of Hebrews. Read it at your leisure. There were three great characteristics of the people who drifted throughout the wilderness.

First of all, a life of utter restlessness. If you're not cut off, if you're not cut off like many were by the curse, cut off as they were in New Testament times too, because of the sin of transgression, cut off like an Ananias and Sapphira, then you suffer a life of utter restlessness. God swore that his people would not enter into rest.

Hebrews chapter 3. They wandered around in circles, they struck the camp, they built it again, they struck the camp, they built it again, and they moved around in a circle of utter restlessness. Oh, how many Christians I know who know nothing of inner rest, nothing of harmony, nothing of joy, nothing of peace, just a round of utter restlessness. They know nothing of rest.

Rest! They can't sing with Evan Hopkins, my Savior, thou hast offered rest, then give it now to me, the rest of ceasing from myself to find my all in thee. They don't know anything about it. Restlessness.

Are you a restless individual? If it's not restlessness, then it's a life of utter aimlessness. It's written in that same passage that for forty years they wandered in the wilderness. Forty years! They got nowhere! They got nowhere! They saw the same sand dunes, they saw the same disappointing mirages, they saw the same footmarks, they saw the same old camping grounds.

They got nowhere. Forty years! Worst of all, it was a life of utter wastefulness. They achieved nothing.

Indeed, the Scripture says in that very same passage, their carcasses fell in the wilderness, or literally, they fell limb from limb, except Joshua and his colleague Caleb, they all fell short of joy. They never plunged into those icy cold waters to emerge on resurrection side in all the fullness of that which Canaan speaks of victory and satisfaction and purpose. They dropped short.

Listen, you're going out into the ministry. You're going out as preachers. You're going out as missionaries.

This is what you're going to discover as soon as you begin to preach. My beloved young friends here, I'm finding it right across America. Ten thousand times ten thousands of Christians across America, yes, and across the world today, will never, never enter Canaan.

They'll die short. Limb from limb, they'll fall as carcasses in the wilderness. They've never achieved any sense of aim.

They've never moved anywhere. They've never got anywhere. They've just wandered around in the wilderness, drifting.

And God calls it the just recompense of reward. They deserve it for transgression and for disobedience. In drifting.

Drifting. The danger of drifting. But you say to me, Stephen Alford, is there an answer to all this? Yes, we're going to spend the rest of chapel hours talking about this, but let us close with this thought.

There is a preventive of drifting. A preventive of drifting. It takes us back to the opening verse.

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest possibly we drift, drift, drift away. The preventive of drifting. It's so simple, it's so simple, that we'll miss it if we don't look for it.

So simple. The first is hearing. Hearing the Lord Jesus.

We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we drift away. I'm absolutely sure that the writer here is referring back to the opening verses of this wonderful, wonderful letter. God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us in his Son.

As Emil Brunner puts it, this is God's conversation with men. God has wrapped up everything he has to say to the world, to the church, in his Son. He has nothing else to say outside of his Son.

His final word, his final thought is in Christ his Son. Hear him! On the Mount of Transfiguration you remember when Moses appeared and Elias appeared, emphasizing the great message of a backed economy. Let us make three tabernacles, said Peter, one for Elias, one for Moses, one for Elias, and one for you, Master.

And God broke through from heaven and said, there is no other word, there is no other prophet, there's no other lawmaker that must be heard. This is me, my beloved Son. He, he, him.

And young people, I want to say this from my heart. It sounds simple to say, but I say it after 22 years of preaching. There's only one voice that matters.

It's Jesus. It's Jesus. Become detached from him.

Listen to other men. Become caught up in the voices and trends of modern theology, radicalism, and all the rest of it. You're lost! Hear him! There's only one voice that matters.

Whether it's on your quiet time period, kneeling before him with an open Bible, and the very breath of heaven upon you, hear him! Whether it's in personal contact, in conversation, hear him! My sheep hear my voice. They that are of the truth, heareth my voice. Whether it's in lecture time, listen for the voice of Jesus.

Pass through human personalities, wards of reading, to hear him! And hearing him, heeding him. Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should drift away. The more earnest, the more earnest heed.

Heed! More heed! More earnest heed! And if hearing him is opening my whole being to the voice of the Savior, then heeding him, obviously, is translating that into immediate and active and continuous obedience. I have preached a hundred times, I suppose, on that text, perhaps hundreds of times, on that text, How Shall We Escape If We Neglect So Great Salvation, to the unconverted. I don't know that I've ever spoken on it fully, as I have in this message to Christians.

I stand up in the open air, and I shout, How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? I've come to see more and more that though there is a message to the unconverted here, whoever the writer is, whether he's Paul or anyone else who wrote the Hebrews, he uses the editorial we, he includes himself, how shall we escape? Born again Christians, how shall we escape? And he's not talking about salvation anyway, he's talking about great salvation, he's talking about so great salvation. Every one of us here knows salvation, but how many of us know the so great salvation? The fullness of life that there is in Christ, which comes to me only by the process of obedience, hearing, heeding, hearing, heeding, all the way. There's no fixation point, there's no point at which we say, now I've arrived, I've achieved, I can't go any further, I've yielded my life to the Lord, what's next? My friend, you've just started, you're just in the shallows.

There's a great ocean, uncharted oceans, of the so great salvation. Your capacity can be deepened every day, and it'll be filled with the ocean of the so great salvation, and it only comes through hearing and heeding, hearing and heeding. What you heard yesterday, is just the beginning of what you're going to hear today.

And hearing, heeding, and heeding, entering in to the so great salvation. Let's have a prayer together. Precious Savior, thou didst never redeem us, in order that we might drift.

Thou didst redeem us, in order that we might do thy will. Save us from drifting, save me from drifting, and open my ear, my heart, to hear and to heed thy loving voice. Do this for every one of us this week, we pray thee, for thy dear name's sake.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/22/SID22550.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/stephen-olford/danger-of-drifting/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**