

Restoring Grace
Part 7 of *Good News About Grace*
Lamentations 5:21
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Relationships are dynamic. They don't stay the same. They are always moving. You are either moving closer to someone or you are drifting apart. Your relationship with Jesus Christ is just like any other relationship in that sense. It needs to be maintained. It needs your attention. Either you are growing closer to the Lord or you are drifting away. You never just stand still in a relationship.

We all know people who have drifted away from the Lord. At one point in their lives they were walking the walk and talking the talk, but now, they are nowhere to be found. It happens. When I first made a faith commitment and invited Christ into my heart, I was warned that if I didn't grow in my faith, then I could fall away, too. We called it "tubing your faith." That's when someone sets their commitment to Christ aside for other things. Their faith goes down the tubes, flushed away. At one point in their lives their hearts were strangely warmed as John Wesley coined the phrase. They were on fire for the Lord but today the flame has gone out and their hearts have grown cold toward God. They are the true frozen chosen.

It is tempting for us to find fault with those who have fallen away, except for the fact that we've all had our ups and downs in our faith. We all know what it's like to struggle and doubt. We all face temptations and distractions to our faith. The **GOOD NEWS ABOUT GOD'S GRACE** is that God does not abandon us when we abandon Him. He draws us back and restores us. That's God's **RESTORING GRACE** at work in our lives. When we blow it, when we walk away, when we stumble and fall, God says, "You can come back to Me." We can pray the prayer that Jeremiah prayed in Lamentations 5:21, ***Restore us, O Lord, and bring us back to You again. Give us back the joys we once had.***

That's what I want to talk to you about this morning. How do you get the joy back in your Christian life once you drift away? Maybe you've been a Christian for years, even decades. Maybe at one point in your life you were much closer to the Lord and you experienced a lot more joy in the Lord then. How do you get the joy back?

Before we look at that I want to mention four common causes of why people fall away from the Lord. In Mark's Gospel, chapter 14 we find the story of Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. He was so passionate and so committed—on fire for the Lord, but on the night Jesus was betrayed and arrested, Peter fell away. Jesus tells him, "...you will disown me." But Peter replied in his typical foot-in-mouth, braggadocios way, ***Even if I have to die with***

you, I will never disown you.”—Mark 14:31. You can almost hear the arrogance in his voice. “All these others may cop out but not me!”

THE FIRST CAUSE OF FALLING AWAY IS OVER CONFIDENCE. When we are over confident, we set ourselves up for a fall. When you see someone stumble and fall in their faith and you say, “That would never happen to me!” you are setting yourself up for a fall. The Bible says, *“Pride goes before...a fall.”*—Proverbs 16:18. Given the right situation, any one of us in this room is capable of any sin. The Bible says, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”*—Jeremiah 17:9. We even lie to ourselves, not just to others. We are incurable liars. I can’t even figure out why I do what I do, much less figure out why you do what you do. We don’t always know why we do what we do. No Christian should ever say, “I could never fall like that.” That’s over confidence and that’s the first way to fall away from the Lord. Remember: EGO stands for Edging Out God. When you’re over confident, when your EGO gets in the way, you are in for a fall.

THE SECOND CAUSE OF FALLING AWAY IS LAZINESS. When we get lethargic and slack off, we start to think—all the good habits we used to do like praying every day, reading the Bible every day, being in a study/fellowship group, maybe we don’t have time for them now. When you stop doing the things that grow your faith, it ought to be a warning light to you. We see this in the story of Peter’s denial. He just got tired of following Jesus. Jesus took Peter, James and John, his closest three disciples, into the Garden to pray. He asked them to watch and pray so they wouldn’t fall into temptation. But what did they do? They fell asleep. Jesus said to Peter, *“Are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour?”*—Mark 14:37.

There is a major principle here: When you get tired, you’re setting yourself up for major temptation. It’s more difficult to do the right thing when you’re tired. It takes a lot of energy to do the right thing. You’re going to get tired—emotionally, physically, spiritually, in every area of your life. If you don’t recharge yourself, fatigue and laziness will set in. And when you’re tired, that’s when you’re most vulnerable to temptation. I’ve talked to a lot of people, Christian people, who’ve stumbled in major ways in their walk with the Lord. It always seems to be during a time of great stress, when they are exhausted, and they ignored the warning lights of laziness. Vince Lombardi once said, **“Fatigue makes cowards of us all.”** When we are tired, we are most vulnerable to a fall. Jesus told Peter, *“Watch and pray so you won’t fall into temptation.”*—Mark 14:38. But Peter was too tired to pray. He got lazy and fell asleep. We can do that too in our faith.

THE THIRD CAUSE OF FALLING AWAY IS FEAR. When we become afraid to follow Christ, for fear of rejection, or ridicule, or that others would think we’re weird, maybe even call us weak, then we set ourselves up for a fall. This is what happened to

Peter. He became afraid to follow Jesus. After Jesus was arrested it says in Mark 14:54, ***"Peter followed Him at a distance..."*** He was afraid to get too close for fear others would know he was one of Jesus' followers.

Do you ever do that? Do you ever follow Jesus from a distance? Do you want to keep enough distance between you and the cause of Christ so no one will identify you as His follower? Do you let your fear keep you from speaking up for what you know is right? The Bible says, ***"Fearing people is a dangerous trap."***—Proverbs 29:25. When you start worrying about what others think of you, you're in trouble. It's a snare and it's going to catch you. Jesus said, ***"If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words, I will be ashamed of him before the holy angels and My father in heaven."***—Mark 8:38.

There's a book titled ***"The Embarrassed Believer: Reviving Christian Witness in an Age of Unbelief."*** In it the author, Hugh Hewitt, talks about the epidemic in our American culture among Christians who are afraid to stand up for Christ, afraid to speak up and be identified as a believer. We let ridicule and criticism keep us from following Christ too closely. This is serious. In Revelation 21:8, cowardice is listed along with murder and sexual immorality. That's how serious it is to be embarrassed because of your relationship with Jesus Christ. When you are afraid of being identified as a follower of Christ's, you are on the slippery slope of falling away. That's what happened to Peter and it will happen to you. Peter let fear control him and he denied knowing Christ.

THE FOURTH CAUSE OF FALLING AWAY IS CONVENIENCE. We want to have a faith, but we want to have a comfortable faith. We want it to fit our schedules. We want a faith that is convenient. Sure, I want to follow Christ, as long as it doesn't make me give up too much of the comforts of life. Look what happened to Peter. It says, ***"Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire."***—Mark 14:54. This is an amazing scene. Jesus has just been arrested and Peter is hanging out with the enemy because they have one of the conveniences he likes—a warm fire. These are the very men who are going to carry out the orders to torture and execute Christ. Peter is sitting around the campfire with them—hanging out, wanting to be comfortable.

We are warned, ***"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."***—1st John 2:15-17.

Since I became a Christian, I've watched a lot of people fall away. There's a pattern that seems to take place. First thing they stop is their giving. Jesus said you're giving indicates your heart. He said where your treasure is your heart will be also. Your giving is a

good indicator of your spiritual health. It's like an EKG of your heart. How's your giving? That's usually the first thing that stops when a person is falling away. The second thing is prayer. The third thing is attending.

What happens when a Christian falls away? How does God respond to them? He responds the way He always responds to His children. He responds in grace. In Romans 8:1 it says, "***There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.***" The word there for "no" is the strongest possible negative in the Greek language. It means absolutely, positively NO. This is not a promise everyone can claim. It's not saying anybody can do whatever they want to do and there will be no condemnation. It says for those who are in Christ Jesus. If you are a genuine believer in Jesus Christ, if you have put your whole faith in Him and what He has done for you on the cross to save you from your sins, there is no condemnation.

Notice it doesn't say there are no consequences. There are a lot of consequences. When you ignore what God commands, when you intentionally don't do what God wants you to do, there will be major consequences. Every time you disobey God, every time you ignore His will, every time you don't follow His instruction you suffer the consequences. You hurt yourself and you hurt other people. When you sin, you lose your fellowship with Christ, you lose your effectiveness on earth, you lose rewards in heaven, you lose the joy of following Christ. The most miserable people on earth are not unbelievers but believers who act like unbelievers. You lose a lot, but you cannot lose your salvation. Why? Why is that? **WHY DOESN'T GOD REJECT BELIEVERS WHEN WE SIN?** I'm going to give you **FIVE REASONS:**

FIRST, GOD WILL NEVER REJECT A BELIEVER BECAUSE HIS LOVE IS UNCONDITIONAL. Once a person is truly saved, that person can never lose their salvation. That is the doctrine of PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS. Once saved, always saved. God chose you to be His and He brought you to faith in Christ. He will never reject you. God will never stop loving you. Although people are free and responsible, they cannot choose salvation of their own accord. God changes our hearts to enable us to choose Him. Faith is a gift from God. It is a work that God performs in us. It cannot be walked away from. The Bible says, "***God's compassion never ends. It is only His mercies that have kept us from complete destruction.***"—Lamentations 3:22

SECOND, GOD WILL NEVER REJECT A BELIEVER BECAUSE SALVATION IS NOT BASED ON OUR PERFORMANCE. Our salvation is based on God's mercy. Being chosen by God, being made His child, is not based on what we do but on what God does to us and in us. Romans 9:16 says, "***[Our salvation] does not depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.***" Salvation is the work of God in us that his power might be displayed

in us. In Titus 3:5 it says, *"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."*

THIRD, GOD WILL NEVER REJECT A BELIEVER BECAUSE JESUS HAS ALREADY TAKEN OUR PUNISHMENT. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ because Jesus has already paid for those sins. In the United States we have the law of double jeopardy. It says you cannot be tried for the same crime twice. You cannot be convicted for the same crime twice. You cannot be punished for the same crime twice. When Jesus died on the cross, He died for all the sins you would ever commit. Your sins have been paid for in FULL. When Jesus cried on the cross, *"It is FINISHED!"*—John 19:30. He was pronouncing PAID IN FULL! If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, your sins have been paid for in full. Your punishment was already taken by Jesus on the cross. The Bible says, *"When Jesus served as a sacrifice for our sins, He solved the sin problem for God, not only ours, but the whole world's [sin]."*—1st John 2:2.

Some people hear this and they think, well if Jesus has paid for all my sins, I can do whatever I want to do. Funny thing about that. If you are a true believer and understand that Jesus has already paid for all your sins, you don't want to sin anymore. All you want to do is live in gratitude for what Christ has done for you and that means living in obedience to Christ to the best of your ability.

FOURTH, GOD WILL NEVER REJECT A BELIEVER BECAUSE HE UNDERSTANDS OUR WEAKNESSES. He's sympathetic to our struggles. He knows our frailties and our faults. He never loses patience with us. The Bible says, *"He understands our weaknesses, for He faced all of the same temptations we do, yet He did not sin."*—Hebrews 4:15. When Jesus Christ was here on earth, he experienced every temptation known to man. He knows how hard it is to be human. He knows what we are going through. He knows what it's like to be tempted. He understands.

FIFTH, GOD WILL NEVER REJECT A BELIEVER BECAUSE GOD DOES NOT HOLD GRUDGES. Psalm 103:9-13 assures us, *"He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed."* "Those who fear Him" means those who respect Him, those who've put their trust in Him, those who've surrendered their lives to Him, those who truly believe.

For all who have fallen God declares, *"Come back to Me, you unfaithful children, and I will forgive you for being unfaithful."*—Jeremiah 3:22.