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WATCH OUT! FAITH KILLERS!

We are reminded as believers in Christ that we are travelers. We are pilgrims, simply passing through this world. But it's not easy. We don't want to be on the move, we want to settle down. We don't want to let go, we want to hold on. We certainly don't want to wait, for we want things now! This is why Hebrews was written. The writer wrote to alert believers with spiritual "danger signs." *Stop! Dead End! Turn Around!* Let's briefly take a look at each of these danger signs to our faith.

Danger of DRIFTING (Heb 2:1) *We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.*

The picture in this first warning is that of a boat not properly tied to the dock. Soon the boat moves away from the shore. Ever so slowly it is carried off into sea by the waves. Once I remember going fishing in a lake with some church friends. We were so excited to fish we forgot to let down the anchor. Before we knew it we ended so far from the shoreline. There are two kinds of people who drift away: there are those who are "careless," and then there are those who "care less and less" about their faith. The first are those who got distracted. You become busy and preoccupied with many things. One day you woke up realizing how far you've moved away from

Christ. The second are those who got disinterested. God and church were good during your younger days, but now that you are older, you have more important things to attend to. You've heard all those Bible stories. So you chose to drift away from God. Notice, this does not happen overnight. The essence of drifting is it happens so slowly, many times imperceptibly. By the time you realize you've drifted, it's too late.

Why do we get so easily distracted, disinterested? Look with me at 1:1, Hebrews begin with, *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways ..."* For many of us that describes our Christian life. "In the past, God spoke." God is the God of the past. Yes, God spoke, but it was in the past. Yes, He did great things, but that was in the past. For you, He's NOT the God of the present, let alone the God of your future. But let's read Hebrews 1:1 again, *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways BUT in these last days (and that includes today), God has spoken to us by His Son ..."* God has spoken in the past, but do you know He is still speaking today? Do you know God has something to say to you today? Jesus said in John 10:10, *"I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full."* Jesus does not offer His life just for your past, or on Sun-

days, or when you're at church. He offers you His strength, grace for your present, for your future. He offers you His love, mercy for every single day of the week. But you need to let Him into your everyday life. Talk to Him, listen to Him. You need to first acknowledge that He is here. And if you do, you won't drift - because you will realize you wouldn't want to be anywhere without Him.

Danger of DOUBTING (Heb 3:12) *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.*

The context of this verse is the wilderness experience of the people of Israel. These are the people who experienced God's great miracles: from the Ten Plagues in Egypt, to the parting of the Red Sea, to the provision of water and manna, they've seen it all! But at the end of the day, they chose to gripe, complain, ignore what protection and provision they had already received from God. This is what I call the "spoiled brat" syndrome. These are "kids" who have everything, or at least have a lot more than others, and yet complain how they are deprived and mistreated because they don't have more.

How did they become "spoiled brats"? The answer is found in 3:7-8, here the writer exhorts, *"So, as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you hear His*



voice, do not harden your hearts ...” What is “harden your hearts?” It’s when you are the recipient of

God’s abundant grace and blessings, but do not respond with gratitude and thankfulness. Have you ever met someone who’s ungrateful and unthankful? Notice how they are always grumpy and unhappy. They don’t care how others think or feel. Their hearts are hard like stone. You know they didn’t start that way. Their hearts became hard with each act of ungratefulness and lack of thankfulness. In the same way, when the child of God forgets or refuses to acknowledge whenever they experience God’s goodness and grace. Soon, their hearts are filled with doubt, not praise.

Though Joni Erickson Tada can’t do anything with her hands and feet, God gave her a mouth, she can still talk. Though she can’t do anything by herself, God gave her a loving family who cares and supports her. Though it takes a lot of effort for her to just get up from bed, God gives her the strength to do His work. Joni is full of gratitude and thankfulness to God. Her heart is soft, not hard, toward God. And because of that, she has no room, no time, to doubt or to complain.

Danger of DULLNESS (Heb 5:11, 6:12) *We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn . . . We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

The writer to the Hebrews said he had more things to say but can’t because these believers were “slow to learn.” The NIV translation seems to imply they were not smart enough or

they’re mentally slow. But the New King James had it right when it’s translated as “dull of hearing.” The problem with these believers is NOT that they cannot learn, but that they do not want to learn. They are lazy! The writer wants to give them deeper truths from God’s Word, but they just want the ABC’s. Imagine trying to teach your child algebra, and he says, “No thanks, I’ll just stick with addition, subtraction,” or, what if they ask for baby food because they just don’t like to chew solid food. The sad part is that these believers were supposed to be teachers by now. But because of laziness they were ineffective, useless for God’s work, and His kingdom.

How do we keep ourselves from being dull and lazy in our faith? No, you don’t have to study the Bible for hours and hours. Hebrews 5:14 says, *“But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”* You protect yourself from being dull, being lazy, by applying the Word of God to your life every time you listen. Every effort you make to “use” what you hear keeps God’s Word fresh, relevant, and powerful in your life. It is so “useful” to distinguish good from evil. Applying God’s Word keeps you on the right track instead of what’s wrong.

Danger of DISREGARDING (Heb 10:26, 35) *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left . . . do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.*

This fourth warning at the surface seems to be talking about believers who are living immoral, unholy lives. But I think the writer of Hebrews is talking about a different kind of sinning here. Consider these statements, see if you agree or disagree: (1) *If a person committed a terrible sin, like*

multiple murders, and later confessed his sins and trusted Christ as his Savior, he probably is still not saved; (2) A Christian has to attend church every Sunday, give an offering, and try to be good before God would love and accept him; (3) Only those who are pastors, leaders in the church can expect God’s guidance, strength and blessings in their lives; (4) If you are still struggling with sin in your life, there may come a point when God may just give up on you. What do all these statements have in common? In all of them, Jesus Christ is totally irrelevant. What Jesus had done on the cross, what He is for believers today is not important.

According to the writer to the Hebrews this is sin. It is sin to God when we disregard Christ and His work, when we minimize, or worse, ignore what He has done and is currently doing in our life. If we chose a way without Christ, the writer tells us we will quickly find out it is a dead end. Instead of finding forgiveness, we realize we still bear our sins. Instead of finding God’s acceptance, we find His judgment. Instead of finding assurance and hope, we find fear and despair. But if you keep your confidence in Christ, if Jesus Christ is in the center of your faith and hope, God promises a rich reward. It is not earthly goods and comfort, rather it is the reward of having the very presence of God – His love, joy and peace - in your life. We have all these because Jesus provided the way. He is still leading us to the way back home.

Danger of DENYING (Heb 12:25) *See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from Him who warns us from heaven?*

The writer to the Hebrews warns us of the danger of drifting, of doubting,