

Straying

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Psalms 119:176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

David tells us that he was aware of the fickle ways of even true believers. But, this admission and the following request he makes to the Lord is a most unusual combination among Christians. We all seem ready to say we stray from the paths of the Lord, but we are not nearly so quick to ask the Lord to seek us when we stray. This is a truly noble attitude by David, because it shows the true nature of the born again believer; that he disapproves of this kind of variance even in himself, and that he recognizes the need for the Lord's own search and rescue to call him back from such a devious path. As a rule, we simply get hard-headed and hard-hearted when we begin to wander, and because of that, we do not get the blessing of being in cooperation with the Lord when He comes looking for us. We end up getting handled pretty roughly sometimes by Him because of this. Sometimes it takes a real hard knock from God to turn us from such a wandering path. But, David was ready to be helped to get back to the right way. It also looks like one of the great motivators for why he felt this way lies in his remembering the commandments of the Lord. I have a feeling that as he remembered those commandments, he remembered the language of God about the blessing for walking in His commandments and the punishment promised if we do not walk in them (as in **Deut. 30** and **Heb. 12**).

Now, our actual subject today is about why we go astray; that is, what causes us to go astray. We might be tempted to just sum it up by saying that the devil made us do it, but that is not the whole truth. When we begin to think about our straying, we have to realize that we do so as a result of at least 3 related things. They are: the prevalence of corruption, the snares of the world, and the temptations of Satan. In a way, when we stray, all 3 of these come into play. But, I want to get a little closer to home and look at some actual circumstances, or some ways of thinking that usually start us on the road to straying. So let's look at these and trust the Holy Spirit will make them personal to each of us.

I. The most obvious is the one that has to do with entertaining lust:

- **James 1:14** But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

James 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

- ▶ Lust has so many faces, it is hard to even summarize all the ways a believer can stray from the Lord because of lust. This lust of James covers an entire encyclopedia of passions in humans. If I were to substitute the word “desire” for lust here would it help us realize how broad this category is? There are multitudes of passions between the two extremes.
- ▶ One extreme might be this one: Eve saw that the fruit of the tree of knowledge was good for food, and no doubt desired to know what it tasted like; the thought about what the fruit was like caused her to conceive of the idea of taking one and biting into it; biting into it ushered in the entire textbook of sins among men, and brought forth death...to the whole human race.
- ▶ The other extreme might be this one: At the evening service last week, I ate a small piece of dessert. But when everybody went home, Mark and Lisa gave me the remaining peanut butter pie. When I got home, although I had already had all the sugar I needed for the day, I wanted some of that pie. I had looked at it, imagined how good it would be, I was enticed to open that pie dish and get a big piece and eat it. I was fulfilling a lust for something I didn’t need! It probably did me harm. But I was drawn away and enticed.
- We should pay close attention to the phrase, “drawn away.” It is the essence of straying.
 - ▶ Illustrate: Do any of you have a problem driving when you look off the road at something? When you are drawn to look off the road, you start to stray off the road in your steering.
 - ▶ One big problem: we never know how far our straying will take us
 - Did you know that if an airplane pilot leaves Los Angeles airport to fly to New York that if he strays from his flight path by 1 degree at the time of departure, he will miss the New York airport by at least 42 miles.
 - ▶ We go astray as a result of being “enticed” by unsanctioned desires
 - ▶ Almost every preacher will tell us about how this base emotion of ours can cause us to stray, but too many times we don’t provide any solutions for how to avoid it. So, I’m going to try.
 - ▶ First, know yourself, and be honest with yourself about who you are - you know your weaknesses; you even know when certain desires will be the most likely to snare you. So, what to do?
 - We can start...and ought to start, by calling on the Lord for deliverance (that’s what David has done in our text)
 - Calling on the Lord for deliverance needs to include asking Him for forgiveness
 - Then we must avoid, or flee the situation that sets the stage for us to start longing after...lusting after that which snares us
 - ✓ Illustrate snares and our response to them if we do not flee: My cat has a habit. As far as I know, she can’t resist it. It is catnip. We can drop a little

catnip on the floor and she can't help but immediately get the idea of eating and rolling in it. Once she starts that, she won't quit until it is all eaten and blended into her fur. Do you see the "conceived," "being drawn away and enticed," and making use of the catnip?

- ▶ Where does it start? Even with a cat, it starts with entertaining the idea of using the catnip to get pleasure or fulfillment.
 - Using the cat's experience to apply the same principle to ourselves, we must stop short of entertaining the idea of pursuing the desire
 - Also, if the cat was walled off from reaching the catnip, it would not be able to use the catnip
 - ✓ If we will, by spiritual determination and the help of the Lord, wall ourselves off from reaching out and seizing the desire of the moment, we will never make use of it.

II. Living and thinking according to our own plans

- **James 4:13** Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:
James 4:14 Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.
 - ▶ When we make plans based on our own agenda without any consideration for the role of God in our lives, we are like the farmer (**Luke 12:16-20**) who had a bumper crop and made great plans for storing it and getting rich off it, but God took his life the same night he made those plans.
 - Note that in v. 18 of this account, the successful farmer said: "I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all **my fruits and my goods.**"
 - ▶ We need an axiom to live by in order to stop living like we are independent of God
 - This one will do: **Psalms 31:15** "My times *are* in thy hand...."
 - Here is another: **Rom. 14:8** "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."
 - Here is another: **1Cor. 6:19-20** "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

III. Being caught up with personal living

- I want to distinguish between this and the previous reason by pointing out that I have just talked about an attitude in which we make plans that are totally detached from, and do not take into account, the power and prerogative of God in deciding our fate. This idea here is about us being so absent-minded or distracted while tending to the

human business we do that we stray from our fellowship and contact with the Lord.

- **Luke 9:59** And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

Luke 9:60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

- It is too easy to let personal things of the world take priority over the things of the Lord's business; thus we are led astray by that
 - ▶ Illustrate: Snakes and other reptiles such as turtles, are often captured by scientists to be studied. One method of doing this is to set up drift fences and funnel them into a cage they cannot escape from. The fence acts as a deterrent to keep them from going where they had planned, and also acts as a re-router to a place of imprisonment. Do you see the similarity between this and the distractions and barriers that personal things become to us to redirect our energy and to re-route us into a prison?
 - ▶ This cause for straying will breed not caring about the things of God
 - ▶ See **Rev. 3:14-18**
 - Some who read about this see only a kind of mis-directed philosophy in these Laodiceans. But, on closer examination, we should see that this is really **SPIRITUAL APATHY**. They had become so self-absorbed in material things that they had actually lost all sensitivity to spiritual riches, spiritual growth, spiritual advancement.