



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

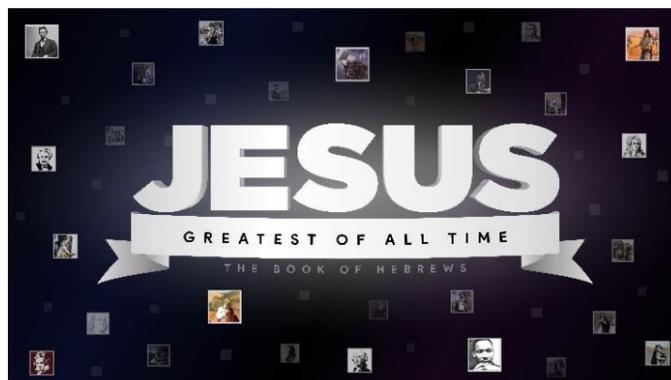
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

The Book of Hebrews

Danger Ahead!

Hebrews 2:1-9

Tim Badal | September 27, 2020



Good morning, church. It's a pleasure to be with you this morning.

Take your Bibles and turn to the book of Hebrews as we continue in our series entitled "Jesus, Greatest of All Time." We don't know who the author of Hebrews was, but we know the audience and what they were going through. They were Jewish Christians in the first century who were being persecuted for their faith. They were being put down by their family and friends because they had put Jesus first in their lives. For this reason, anyone who was opposed to Christ was doing everything in their power to knock these believers down. As a result, the Hebrew Christians were being tempted to give up, give in and return to their former way of life, following the old traditions and rituals in order to be right with God.

So the writer of Hebrews was concerned to persuade these believers that they should not give up on Jesus. He purposefully used passages from the Old Testament to prove to them that in fact Jesus was the greatest of all time. If they gave up on Jesus, they would be giving up on the One Who is greater than the angels and the One through Whom God the Father exclusively saves. They would be giving up on the One Who holds creation in the palm of His hand. To give up on the greatest thing in all the world would be the most foolish thing they could do.

This is a reminder for us this morning as well, if we're tempted to give up on Jesus in order to be popular, to pursue comforts in life or because following Him is too hard. Listen, friends, this would be the most foolish thing on earth you could do. The author of Hebrews is mapping out why we might wander away from the Lord. Clearly, as the Bible indicates, we're all prone to wander from our faith.

Today we're going to examine the first of five warnings found in Hebrews. A lot of people don't like this book because of these warnings that call us to be careful and tell us there is danger ahead. The first warning concerns the danger of drifting. There are a lot of warnings in our lives that are way more flashy than, "Don't drift away." You probably saw such warnings on your drive to church this morning, warnings based on what our government and good sense have decided will keep us safe. That curve you wanted to take at 65 miles per hour, IDOT has decided would only be safely traveled at 45. If we don't follow their warning, we could be hurt. Most warnings make a lot of sense.

I was down in our furnace room at home last night and saw a warning on our hot water heater that said, "Beware of scalding heat." Just because we can turn up the thermostat doesn't mean we should. Someone could turn on the water in the sink expecting it to be safe, only to be burned.

Then there are other warnings that don't make sense to us. It has been a while since I was the one to make our bed, but I was helping Amanda with some of the household chores the other day. Do you know how many warning tags there are on a mattress? There's a reason the warnings are there. probably because at some point someone did something that caused pain and maybe even death. But I have to wonder, how many people have been killed by their mattress? Apparently the mattress lawyers felt a need to warn people of the possible dangers that come from owning a mattress.

There are warnings that make sense and warnings that don't, but I will tell you that the warning we're given today in Hebrews may be one of the most important warnings for all Christians to hear—especially in 21st century America. We're being warned not to drift away. There are flashier warnings, such as . things like don't murder or commit adultery. There are warnings not to fall into idolatry or rebellion. But

drifting? That seems blasé and mediocre. Yet the writer of Hebrews begins chapter two essentially by taking time out to say, “After all we’ve learned about Jesus in chapter one—that He’s the greatest of all time, even greater than the angels—we now need to stop and consider the danger of drifting. In light of all we’ve heard about Jesus, can you believe that some people will still drift away?”

Because Jesus is the greatest of all time, you would think everybody would make Jesus their greatest priority, their greatest pursuit and their greatest endeavor. But the writer says, “You know what people do? They look at Jesus, then they walk away. They drift away.” When I use the word “drifting,” it’s not a common idea. So let’s define it.

Drifting is the slow and subtle process where passions and priorities change.

When the writer of Hebrews uses this term, he’s giving it a nautical meaning, describing a ship not properly anchored drifting out of the harbor. When this happens, it will end up in situations that present danger to it. Its safe place is to be docked in the harbor.

Drifting can happen slowly for us. It’s one decision upon another, one moment upon another. Rarely are we aware of when our drifting started because it’s subtle. We don’t just wake up thinking, “I don’t want to be a Christian any longer.” But as the hymn writer says, we’re prone to wander. We’re prone to drift.

We can drift in our marriages. I’ve been married for over 20 years. Can I say with all my heart that my passion and priority for my marriage has been a ten all the time? No. I’m thankful for a forgiving wife, as well as a wife who at times admonishes me. I’m thankful for friends and family members who warn me that I’m drifting. This isn’t a matter of an outward sin. It’s not a matter of me fraternizing with other women. This is subtle and slow. This is beginning to take my wife for granted. This is not dating my wife as I’m called to do.

We also can drift in our parenting. I have three kids. When the first one arrived, I really focused on him. I wanted to make sure I got the first one nailed down just right. But then the other ones came along and it was easy to get sloppy, to not hone in on them. Why? Well, for one thing we were older then. The faculties weren’t there when the third one showed up.

One of you laughed; you must be on cruise control right now. When we drift, we’re forgetting how stringent we used to be about things. “Yeah, that’s fine. Go ahead. I don’t have the time to pay attention to it.”

But let me ask you something even more convicting. Tomorrow starts another work week and school week. Have you drifted in your work or your studies? “I don’t have to put in the time. The boss isn’t watching. The teacher isn’t around in these virtual classes. I can drift.” Or how about your relationships? How about with your finances? “I was going to start saving, but you know what? This car just came along or this new house or this new technology.” So little by little we drift away, then before we know it we look back and are shocked by how far we’ve drifted.

As important as those things are, the writer of Hebrews isn’t talking about drifting in our marriage, parenting, work or school. Rather, he nails the most important thing: “Don’t drift away from your relationship with Jesus Christ.” Could it be said of you today that your walk with Christ isn’t being lived out with the same passion and priority that it should? Has the excitement for the things of God that was once there grown cold? Think about your enthusiasm for His Word, for prayer and gathering with other believers. What if your desire to share what God has taught you with other people, to serve, to give of your time and talents and treasure isn’t what it used to be?

Oh, you’re not in some sort of all-out rebellion against God. But you don’t have that same fire. Jesus said in Revelation 2:4 that the people had forgotten their first love. That’s what the writer of Hebrews will be warning us about today. And where there’s a warning, we have the ability to fall into the danger he’s pointing us to. It’s real easy when reading this kind of passage to look down the aisle and think, “Boy, I’m glad this person is here at church today. I’ve seen them drifting.” You will always see others drift before you see it in yourself. It’s much easier to see your spouse drifting than it is to see yourself drifting. It’s easy to see it in your kids. It’s easy for a pastor to look at a congregation and say, “They’re drifting,” not seeing the plank in his own eye. We’re all prone to drifting.

Here is what the writer tells us in Hebrews 2:1-9:

¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² 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? 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.

⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?
⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned him with glory and honor,
⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

The author wants us to understand how to find our way back when we're drifting in relationship with Christ. In order to do this, he's going to answer three questions.

1. What are the warning signs?

First, we need to know what the warning signs are. If it's slow and subtle, how can we become aware that it's happening? I've come up with two common patterns that should help us; perhaps you can come up with other ones.

We can drift because of presumption. Someone else will do the work for me.

One common cause of drifting is presumption, . thinking someone else is going to do the work for us. In other words, I'm not the only one responsible for my walk with God—someone else is. Maybe this morning you're sitting next to your spouse. It's not uncommon for spouses to be different in the depth of their relationship with Christ. We're called to be equally yoked with our spouse, so that Christ is first in our marriage, but with any two people, there will be a variance in this. The Bible says, “Be careful that you don't presume that because your wife or husband has a walk that is stronger than yours, that means you can ride their coattails.” Maybe you're thinking, “My wife is really into the Word, so she's doing the work for us. My wife will let me know on the way to small group what I need to know, because she did the study; I didn't. That way I'll have some answers and not look completely ignorant.” Or a woman might think, “My husband is in the men's Bible study, so he's making sure our marriage is where it needs to be. I can stay home and watch Netflix. I'll let him be the leader and we'll be fine.” Presumption says someone else is going to do the hard work, so we don't need to.

Kids, you might have godly parents, which is the greatest blessing any kid can ever have. But what might happen? “Well, they've got the faith thing down, so I'll just ride along with them. They're serving God, so I'm in a good place. God won't separate moms and dads from their kids in glory—that won't happen. I can stand before the throne and tell Jesus, ‘My mom and dad served You well.’”

When I was 14 years old, I had to realize that my parents' faith wasn't good enough to save me. It was a wonderful blessing, but it did not have saving power. I had to come to grips as a teenager with the fact that if this was going to be for me, then I had to own it. I couldn't rely on godly parents.

That's the positive side of presumption, where you're thinking, “I'm just going to lean into Mom and Dad. I'm going to lean into my spouse.” But there's also a negative side which is when we're cynical. “I'm not where I need to be and I know who to blame. If our small group would dig in deeper, then my relationship with Christ would be stronger. If Pastor Tim's messages weren't so long and boring, then I would have a vibrant walk with Jesus Christ. If the worship team sang the kind of songs I want, then I could get into worship. If...if...if...then I might have a real relationship with Jesus.”

There are so many people who blame others for the sin of presumption on their part. Does that mean pastors can't equip? Does that mean pastor's messages should be boring and long? No. There's a level of truth in all that. But that is not what keeps us from our relationship with Christ being vibrant and strong. It falls wholly on your shoulders. Don't presume someone else is going to do it for you.

We can drift because of preoccupation. Something else is more desired than Christ.

The second cause of our drifting is preoccupation, desiring something else more than we desire Christ. This was what the Hebrews were struggling with. They were concerned about their standing in the community. They were concerned about their relationships with their family and friends, with their employers and fellow employees.

They were being challenged by their commitment to Jesus. If they would just stay with their Old Testament way of life, everyone would like them and their life would go well, but the minute they would bring up the resurrected King Who was resurrecting them, the world would say, “Time out. You're not one of us anymore. We're going to make your life painful because you're going against the flow.”

Can we see that happening today as well? How many of our relationships are messed up at work, at school or in our neighborhoods—sometimes even in our homes—because Jesus gets in the way? How often are we tempted to back away from Jesus because it would make our lives so much easier? In the 21st century, preoccupation is probably the greatest sin affecting the evangelical church. You see, we're smart enough and biblically grounded enough to realize we need Jesus, but we can also become preoccupied with everything the world says is important. I don't want to be legalistic, but it seems odd that all kinds of activities and hobbies keep us from a lot of what we should be paying attention to.

As a pastor, I might say to you, "I haven't seen you in a while." "Yeah, we've been busy." "Are you going to join a small group this year?" "Yeah, you know what, no, we've got a lot going on. The kids are going here and there." "We'd love to have you serve in this way." "Yeah, I'd love to, but I just don't have the time." Again, I don't want to be legalistic in this, but what is going on? We are distracted people. Here's the crazy thing. I can assure you that most of those people are not in open rebellion and sin right now. They're out watching their kids play sports. They're pouring themselves into their hobbies. It's a beautiful fall day, so they've decided to take the kids for a bike ride. There are all kinds of things that can distract us.

In our small group we were talking about the importance of gathering with God's people, both in the home and in the church. This is what one person said, and I really appreciated their transparency: "There are a lot of ways I can enjoy my Sundays and my Tuesday nights besides going to church or small group." That's what's tempting us. There are good things. It's a beautiful day today and in Chicago, we don't get many of those. There are a lot of things we could be doing. The person went on to say, "If I don't discipline myself to add these to my schedule and then do them, I will drift away. I need you guys because my heart is a drifting heart."

Once we realize this, then we've taken the first step on the road to recovery.

2. Why is it so serious?

We might be asking why is this so serious? "We're not in open sin or rebellion. How bad can it be when my spiritual walk goes on cruise control? Is that really hurting anyone? So I'm not in the Word like I should be, Pastor. I'm not praying as much. I'm not serving as much. I'm not giving as much. I'm not as in love with Jesus as I once was. Does that really matter? I used to be in love with Him. I said yes to Him, didn't I?"

Hebrews 2:3 tells us we're not asking the right question. It says, "*How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*" That should be jarring to us. The writer is saying, "In light of all Christ has done and is doing in your life—the blessings He pours on you in your salvation and your sanctification, giving you all you need for life and godliness—are you just going to be casual about your faith?"

We need to remember that God is not casual about holding up the universe. Christ wasn't casual in laying down His life for us. The Holy Spirit isn't flippant when He sealed us. So why, as recipients of His grace and mercy and love, are we so flippant as to allow ourselves to drift? The author of Hebrews is asking how can we neglect such a great salvation? D.A. Carson put it this way:

People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.

All of this drifting, as subtle and slow as it is, is serious. Why? Because it offends God. God is not saying, "Oh, look at My child who's not taking this seriously. Well, kids will be kids." No. He's saying, "After all I've done?"

Parents, think about this. After taking 18 years to raise your child, after you've poured yourself into them, after you've invested so much money and time and effort, then your child, little by little, decision by decision, says, "Yeah, thanks but no thanks." You don't think that would offend you? You don't think that would bring great grief to your heart?

Later in Hebrews the writer will say, "When we drift, we trample the Son of God under foot. We take all the blessings God has, throw them on the ground and step on them, as if they're nothing." But why would we do this? You might be thinking, "Wait a minute. Just because I don't pray, just because I'm not in the Word, just because I'm not as fired up as I should be about my faith, why is that so serious?" Let me give you three reasons from our text.

Drifting is serious because it leads us to dismiss God's message.

First, when we drift it means we're dismissing God's message. We read in verses two through four, *"For since the message declared by angels"—that's the Ten Commandments, the Law the angels brought to Moses from God—"proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,"—that is, the disciples and those who were around Jesus—"while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will"*—so it wasn't just by words.

The writer is essentially saying, "You can trust the message of the gospel. You can trust it because of who it comes through. The angels that brought it are reliable. It comes through Jesus and He is reliable. It can also come from the reliable witness of those who laid their lives on the line, those who saw and heard what Jesus said." The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 1:1, "These are things we've heard ; we've seen it with our eyes; we've felt it with our hands." All of these people are saying, "Everything we know about Jesus is true, so believe our message" and many of them went to their death because of it.

The author of Hebrews does what Portillo's does. You didn't see that curve ball coming, did you? Some of you are thinking about Italian beef right now. How many of you have been inside Portillo's? Dick Portillo, the owner of that fine establishment, has a great marketing ploy. He gets all of the famous people who have eaten there to give him a picture of themselves with a written message about how much they enjoyed the food. Then when you walk into Portillo's, you see pictures of actors and other famous people where they're saying, "That was a great lunch. Sure was a great hot dog, or burger. Those fries, that shake, was amazing." What is the result? It gives us confidence that when we order our 45,000 calories worth of food, we're going to be satisfied.

The writer of Hebrews is saying, "When you take that step of faith, there is a great cloud of witnesses who are there to say to you, 'Don't give up. It's worth it. It's worth the pain and the sorrow. It's worth the dedication and the diligence required to sustain your relationship with Christ.'" We cannot treat the gospel flippantly—why? God Himself has spoken and He is still speaking to us today. Will His words go in one ear and out the other? One of the greatest frustrations for me as an adult is when someone says, "Hey, Tim, can I get some advice?" They hear my advice, then do the exact opposite. Do you know what I say to them? "Don't ever come to me again." Why am I wasting my time? Imagine what God must be saying. He sent His one and only Son. As followers of Christ we can say, "Yeah, I got it. I know the old, old story. But the golf course is calling me." And we dismiss it.

Drifting is serious because it leads us to disregard God's judgments.

Second, we can disregard God's judgments. He writes in verse two, *"For since the message declared by the angels...."* He's telling the Jewish believers, "Before you came to Christ, you lived by the Law. You positioned yourself in accord with the Law. You didn't miss a beat. You always made sure there wasn't a jot or tittle that was missed in the Law. You nailed it. But that was only a message from the angels. Now the message is being brought to you by Christ Himself, the Son of God." He's reminding them of what happened when the Israelites disregarded the Law they had received. There are stories upon stories of God's response to their disobedience, His judgments and wrath poured out on them.

My family is from the Assyrian ethnicity and we're mentioned in the Bible. Do you know that the only time we're mentioned in the Bible is when God used our people to deal with Israel? My ancestors became famous because the Jewish people drifted away from God. History tells us that God decided to judge His people by bringing the wicked Assyrians to overpower them. Deuteronomy 28 lists the blessings and the curses God laid before His people. The first third of the chapter tells of the blessings they would receive if they were faithful to obey His commands. But two-thirds of the 68 verses in that chapter contain the curses that would result from drifting and disobedience.

"But Tim, God doesn't punish. God doesn't do those things now. That's the Old Testament God. That's why I like the New Testament God." Let's be reminded that in the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul says, "Some of you are sick and others are dead, because you made a mockery of the work of God." We don't like to hear that as Christians. Our doctrine gets in the way of that. Where does God's Word say that Christians are not disciplined for sin? In fact, the writer of Hebrews will say later, in Hebrews 12, "Shore up your feeble knees under the rod of discipline."

Some of you right now may be in turmoil. I'm painting with a broad brush, but some of you might be going through trials because you have drifted away and God in His love and mercy is trying to get your attention. He's saying, "You have walked away from your first love."

Drifting is serious because it leads us to discount the work of Christ.

Finally, drifting discounts the work of Christ. Look at Hebrews 1:5-9, in which the author quotes Psalm 8:

⁵For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?”

⁷You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned him with glory and honor,

⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

There's a weird interlude in this passage, describing man's place in the realm of angels. Remember last week how we learned that Jesus is greater than the angels?. But then we also know Jesus took on flesh. So where does that leave us? That's why the writer includes this little history lesson. In it he agrees that we were the apex of creation, so all of creation was subject to us. Even though we were made a little lower than the angels, our relationship with God gave us our authority. Then something happened. Because of the fall, the earth that was created to be under our dominion, working with us, is now working against us. We ceded our authority to the devil through our sin.

But the coming of Jesus in the flesh brought humanity back to its rightful place. He did what the first Adam did not do; He followed the commands of the Father perfectly. The last Adam, Jesus, fulfilled what the first Adam chose not to do. But in order to restore humanity to our rightful place, Jesus paid an extreme price—death itself.

Wait a minute, you're thinking. God doesn't die. The God of the universe Who has always existed and will always exist, Who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end—the omnipotent, omniscient and ever-present God—does not die. Yet when Jesus went to the cross, that's what happened. The Son of God laid down His life for us.

Let me ask what thing in this world, what pursuit, what endeavor, what relationship is more important than that? There is none. But sadly, we forget this. So the author of Hebrews is saying to us, “Be careful!” Like “Lost in Space,” he's saying, “Danger, Will Robinson!” Anybody younger than 40 has no earthly idea what I'm talking about. But there's danger ahead.

3. How do I find success against it?

Don't drift away. Don't dismiss the message of God. Don't disregard God's judgments. Don't discount the work of Christ. How do we do that? How do we find success? Let me close with this. Don't drift. That's an easy solution. Well, that's not the answer you're looking for.

I love that the writer says this, because this is a message that the legalist in all of us wants to point the finger and say, “Boy, you need to hear this.” The problem is you're pointing this way when you need to be pointing back toward yourself. Notice what it says in verse one. “Therefore,” you Hebrews, “pay much closer attention.” . Therefore, all you drifters, you need to pay closer attention. Therefore, Village Bible Church—not the staff, just the parishioners—pay closer attention. That's what my Amplified Bible says. Therefore, everyone who's not standing behind a pulpit right now.

No, I love this writer. He says, “Therefore we,” and he puts himself in there. It's easy to preach about drifting; it's hard for your pastor to live it. I'm broken-hearted over the amount of wasted time, the needless things I've pursued instead of that which Christ calls me to do. So this text beats me up; . I should know better. But like the hymnwriter says, “Tim is prone to wander.” Boy, do I feel that. Boy, am I prone to leave the God I love.”

So what should I do? What's the answer? The answer is in verse one: “...pay much closer attention...” The idea here is focusing whatever lens you're using to make sure you're seeing clearly. Another image is the idea of putting blinders on a horse so it doesn't see anything except what's right in front of it. All the things on the periphery are not important. What's important is what's ahead of it.

This is why the writer says we must fix our eyes on Jesus. It's attention. It's focus. We need to turn our gaze toward Christ and all He's done. “Therefore we must...” It's not a suggestion, Christian. It's not pleasant platitudes. It's not a proverb. This is a “must.” We must fix our eyes on Jesus, because when we don't, we will drift away. Not maybe. Not might. We will drift away. Kevin DeYoung put it this way:

Heaven never tires of the cross and neither should we. The saints in glory never grow weary of singing the old, old story: "Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain to receive glory, honor, power, wealth and wisdom, might, honor and blessing"—and neither should we.

But we do. So what do we do?

Deliverance from drifting is found through my daily dependence on and devotion to the gospel!

Our takeaway for today is that deliverance from drifting is found through your daily dependence on... Let's stop here for a moment. You can't do this on your own. You cannot roll up your sleeves and say, "I'm not going to drift away." You cannot do it in your own strength. The hymn we'll sing later says, "Lord, take my heart, take and seal it, seal it for the courts above." We need the Holy Spirit in this.

Deliverance from drifting means we pray and say, "God, I can't do this on my own. God, take away these distractions. God, fill me with such a love and passion for Your things so that I'll depend on You and not my own strength." Every day we need devotion to the gospel. It's not devotion to work, to relationships, to our money, to our hobbies or to our possessions. Rather, it's a daily dependence on and devotion to the gospel, the message of Jesus Christ. Because He is the greatest of all time, we must make Him our greatest endeavor, our greatest pursuit and our greatest priority in everything we do. Are you drifting today? Anchor yourself firmly in the grace that saved you, digging into all that God has for you. Relish the fact that God has invited you into relationship with Him because of His Son.

And remember that this relationship came at a cost. You might say, "Well, it's free to me." Yeah, you can't do anything to earn it. But the Bible says that anyone who would come after Christ must deny himself daily and take up his cross. Jesus wasn't the only one who sacrifices in the Christian life. Jesus' sacrifice is the only one that saves, but Jesus calls every one of us into a daily sacrifice. If we don't, we'll drift away.

Here's why God doesn't want you to drift away. Because He loves you; and because He knows that when you are with Him and not drifting out to sea, you will experience the greatest peace, contentment, joy, fulfillment and abundance. Jesus invites you: "Have a closer walk with Me." Amen? This is a great warning for us.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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