

I remember the first and only time I attempted skiing. I had taken a high school youth group to a ski slope in eastern Pennsylvania. It was not really much of a sky slope. It wasn't more than a hill in the middle of a corn field. And then there wasn't any real snow on it. A snow maker blew artificial snow onto the hill. It would be more accurate to call it an ice-maker because when we got there the hill was a sheet of ice. I think it would have been easier and safer to have issued ice skates to everybody. It was so icy people were actually skiing down sideways. I had never been skiing before so I and some of my youth group joined a class. The instructor told us how to put on our skis and turn around, walk, and ski. Unfortunately, I fell down when I attempted to put my skis on and ended up sliding all the way down the hill with my skis tangled up around my feet. I was lucky to get away with only a dislocated shoulder.

As I think of that experience I think of how much ^{like} the Christian life that is. We have great goals. We are going to climb, climb up sunshine mountain, faces all aglow when we first come to Christ and trust Him as our Lord and Saviour.

We have great ideals and goals but it isn't long before we stumble and fall and go ~~falling~~ ^{sliding-backward} down sunshine mountain, face and heart full of bruises. We are discouraged after a number of failures of this sort and finally settle for wandering around at the foot of sunshine mountain with clouded faces.

From Scripture Lesson

Moses talks about this process of backsliding which is so familiar to most of us. Moses is addressing the children of Israel at the end of their wilderness journeys and on the eve of their entrance into the promised land. The book of Deuteronomy contains the farewell speeches and sermons of Moses. In our Scripture Lesson this morning Moses warns the children of Israel of the possibility of their backsliding once they have entered the promised land, conquered it, and have become prosperous and comfortable. He warns them that their backsliding will cost them dearly. They will utterly perish from off the land. They shall be utterly destroyed. And the Lord shall scatter them among the nations.

But if from there you seek the Lord your God, he
~~In short, Moses describes the process of backsliding, the~~
~~says, you will find Him if you look for him~~
~~provision for backsliders, and the promise of restoration~~
~~with all your heart and with all your soul."~~
~~to backsliders when they seek the Lord earnestly, heart and~~
~~soul.~~

Now this morning I would like us first to look at this process of back-sliding; this turning from the living God

whom we have come to know through faith in Jesus Christ; turning from God to idols and finally actually doing evil in the sight of the Lord. Backsliding never begins by a man or woman who has come to know Christ suddenly doing evil in the sight of God. No! The process of backsliding begins ever so subtly so one is hardly aware of it.

It's important for us to realise this. Usually when we think of a backslider we think of the man who made a decision for Christ and who now is a alcoholic or the ~~couple~~ ^{couple} who came forward at an evangelistic campaign and who were on fire for a few years but who are now inactive and cold. A backslider however is more likely to be an active member of the church. He or she may be an elder or a deacon or some officer or leader in the church. The backslider may very likely have a reputation for holiness and faithfulness. The backslider may ^{ever} be evangelistic and witness to people about Christ every day. ^{A backslider may be all these} Because, you see, a backslider never begins at the bottom of the hill. What makes a backslider is the direction he or she is traveling.

^{E.g.} Here is a converted alcoholic. He struggles and agonises and prays for strength to overcome this addiction to alcohol. We may look at him as a very weak Christian near the bottom of the hill. But if he is going upward, he is not a back-

slider. Here, on the other hand, is a minister or an elder or a church leader of some sort who has a reputation for holiness, who has a great knowledge of Scripture, who has been a Christian for a long time. They may well up the hill as we weaker Christians look at them near the bottom. But unless they are going upward they are sliding backwards. As St. Augustine once said, "There is no standing still." We are either making progress in sanctification, climbing up sunshine mountain, faces all aglow, or we are sliding backward however imperceptibly.

Look at your life today. You may be a very active member of this church. You may be an elder, a deacon, a person of some prominence in the congregation or you may be one of those hidden peoples who knows the Lord. Compare your life and heart now to what it was when you first came to know the Lord. Compare your thoughts, habits, desires now with when you first trusted Christ as your saviour. When you became a Christian you were careful, anxious to please Christ. You may have erred on the side of fanaticism. You may have been too scrupulous in your self-examination. But where are you now? Are ^{you} now doing, thinking, saying, planning things which would have brought shame to you then?

I know of a man who use to carry his Bible to school with him when he was in high-school. In some ways he was

obnoxious in his zeal. But instead of making progress and adding knowledge and tact to his zeal he has gone the other direction. Today he is a very orthodox and sound Christian. He is active in his church. But he is so embarrassed about those Bible toting memories and his youthful fanaticism that he is actually antagonistic about a verbal witness to Christ today. He is a morally impeccable man. He is a doctrinally correct man.^{He worships regularly & has prayer for his} But he is a back-slider with a reputation for holy living and sound faith.

What direction are you heading? Are you going up hill in the Christian life? Are you going down hill? Or have you pitched your tent on the side of the mountain hoping for Christ to come real soon?

But Moses goes on to tell us that God has made provisions for backsliders. "But if from there (i.e., your back-slidden place) you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul." God holds out this hope of restoration for those who seek the Lord their God. And how are they to seek Him? With all their heart and with all their soul. He is talking about an intense search, not a hurried thing five minutes a day or once a week... but a heart and soul

search which forces you to reorient your whole life ~~around~~
~~the~~.

And what are we to look for? Not experiences nor even a return to the past, but the Lord. We are to seek the Lord. Sometimes a church backslides, as the O.T people of God did and as we so often do today. What is the church to do? Seek the Lord. I know the Lord has done wonderful things in the past in Knox church. Many of you remember the great impact of the Leighton Ford services some 25 years ago. Some of you who are leaders were converted at that time. You have told me of prayer meetings where you remained in prayer, ^{intense} ~~intense~~, sincere prayer until late into the night before making a major decision. But there is a certain danger in seeking to recapture those experiences and events. There is a danger in nostalgia. We are not to seek to recapture the past. We are to seek the Lord and to seek the Lord heart and soul.

Let me give you an illustration of this from my own experience. A number of years ago I was concerned about the lack of real prayer in my life. I prayed for months that God would give me a heart to seek the Lord, that he would give me a heart to pray. But he didn't seem to answer that prayer. Then, one morning, the thought came to me, "You have been praying for a heart to seek the Lord. What

is preventing you from seeking him now? What is preventing you from spending the next hour or two seeking the Lord in prayer? What is preventing you from speaking the whole day in prayer and fasting?"

The thought was a frightening one. It was like God was telling me either to fish or cut bait. I was asking God to give me a heart to seek him, but what was preventing me from seeking him? ^{what was preventing me from praying that day?} I had to confess I would rather do something else. I had other priorities. Other things were more important; reading, visiting, studying. I was convicted of my sin and my backsliding. I turned to God once more in prayer, determined to seek him heart and soul that day. I got down on my knees in my study and prayed. I forced myself to pray ^{for an hour.} I sought the Lord heart and soul. That was the beginning of a growing desire to pray. There were and have been times that I have come to the end of the hour and just wanted to keep on going... like Jacob wrestling with the Angel of the Lord and saying, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

What about you? What is preventing you from seeking the Lord heart and soul? What is preventing you from seeking the Lord heart and soul this afternoon, this Lord's Day afternoon? This evening? Tomorrow morning? Whatever

it is and however innocent it is in and of itself it is your idol if it prevents you from seeking the Lord heart and soul.

Finally, there is the promise to those who seek. You will find God. "But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul." This is not directed primarily to men and women who never knew the Lord. It is not directed to those who have never found him. It is directed to men and women who once stood in the very presence of God at the foot of Mt Sinai, who were delivered from the iron furnace in Egypt, from slavery; who have seen God work miracles in their lives by opening the Red Sea and feeding them with manna in the desert.

And many of you have found the Lord? You ^{once} ~~have~~ experienced something of his power and grace. You have stood before the Lord Jesus Christ. You have found the Lord. But where have you gone from there? Have you been following the Lord? Have you backslidden? Has the Lord been lost by you? Have you grown cold in your love for the Lord? Do you sincerely seek the Lord heart and soul in prayer?

Do you sometimes wonder where God is? He seems so far away. He once seemed so close and real. You are constantly looking back to that experience you had long ago but cannot point to anything since then of the Lord's working in your life. There is the old song. But there is no new song. Then earnestly seek the Lord heart and soul and He promises that you will find him, you will be renewed, he will give you a new song; *And he will renew & revive our church & its witness in this community.*

Seek the Lord heart and soul and you will find him and you will find him to be compassionate. "For the Lord Thy God is a merciful God) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee." He is not out to get you and to drag you over the coals. He is a waiting father standing in the doorway waiting to be found by his prodigal son and daughter.

Last night Andrew knocked over Philip for some unknown reason. I had to give him a spanking. He cried bitterly and ran away from me. But it wasn't long before he came back to me. He was sorry. He wanted to know that I still loved him. He wanted to be held in my arms. What did I do when Andrew came back to me seeking reconciliation and restoration? Did I say, "Ah, good I have you just where I want you, groveling in remorse and guilt. Go into the closet and stay there for a few hours." Of course not. My heart was melted. My

eyes became teary. I took him eagerly into my arms and hugged him and kissed him.

God is a waiting father. He waits for you. What is it in your life which is preventing you from seeking the Lord heart and soul this morning, this afternoon, this evening? Wherever you are in your relation to God, "if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul."

AMEN