

He didn't realize...  
Judges 16:13-22  
John 6:56-69

Tim Hawkins is a Christian comedian who often uses church sports stories for his routines. He shared with an audience once, "I'm coming off a few years of backsliding. Every night it was drunkenness and fighting and foul-language. Finally I said, 'Ya know what? I'm quitting church softball!'"

I'm proud to say that he wouldn't have had to quit our team. Our guys know why they're out on the field – it's to have fun and witness to the other teams that real men love Jesus!

Another real man was Samson. You remember him – the guy that God raised up as a judge and was given the gift of physical strength. He was so strong that one time he killed 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. However, like Hawkins, he had an issue with backsliding. That's actually what I want to talk about today – our tendency, as Christians, to backslide.

Have you ever had the experience of feeling like your relationship with Christ was rock-solid? You were faithful in your spiritual life and religious practices – the kind of practices that helped you grow closer to Christ and become more like Him. However, as months went by life happened. You grew busy and distracted; and, one day something happened and you realized that your life was a mess and you couldn't remember the last time you even said a brief prayer.

If we are honest with ourselves, I believe we will all confess to having times like that. The transformation away from God is so slow that we don't even realize it's happening. Like a frog in a pot, we aren't cognizant that we are in trouble until it's too late.

That's what happened to Samson. Samson was man of God. In fact, he was dedicated to God as a Nazirite. This institution was a symbol of a life devoted to God and separated from all sin, it was intended to be a holy life. Normally, one only took the vows of a Nazirite for 30 days; however, Samson was one of three mentioned in the Bible who followed the vows for life. Uncut hair was an outward symbol of their consecration of their life to God.

Samson allowed his consecration to God to be compromised by physical and emotional desires. He allowed the women in his life to distract him from his relationship with God. Like many of us, this turning away happened so gradually that he thought everything was just as it had always been between God and him. We see that expressed in Judges 16:20.

*When he woke up, he thought, "I will do as before and shake myself free." But he didn't realize the Lord had left him.*

Now some say there is no such thing as backsliding. They point to passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:17 – *This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

They say that since you are new, if you backslide you never really belonged to Christ in the first place.

The truth is people have been messing up in their relationship with God since the beginning. Here are just a few examples:

- 1 Samuel 15:26 – *But Samuel replied, "I will not go back with you! Since you have rejected the Lord's command, he has rejected you as king of Israel."*
- John 6:66-67 – *At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?"*
- Jeremiah 17:5 – *This is what the Lord says: "Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the Lord."*
- Luke 8:13 – *Even Jesus told a parable with backsliding illustrated in it. The seeds on the rocky soil represent those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they believe for a while, then they fall away when they face temptation.*

For those who are justified by the saving work of Jesus Christ, there is still the work of sanctification to be done. This process of sanctification is not completed at the moment we are justified. It takes time and cooperation with the leading of the Holy Spirit to progress in sanctification – this journey toward being more fully set apart from the world and made more in the image of Christ.

Why do Christians backslide? The main reason is that we do not abide in Christ. The word for abide in the New Testament means to stay, continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain – in relationship with Jesus Christ. When we don't abide in Christ our world falls apart. All living things – including relationships – wither and die from neglect.

There is hope.

How do we get back into a good relationship with Christ? We abide in Christ.

The promise to every backsliding Christian is, *"Return to Me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts"* (Malachi 3:7). Acknowledge your sin, turn from it, trust in the Lord for forgiveness and ask the Holy Spirit to take control of your mind, heart and daily life.

Abide in Him as you meditate on His Word.

Abide in Him as you participate in holy worship alongside like-minded Christians.

Abide in Him as you serve others and witness to your faith.

There are many influences in the world that compete for your allegiance and for mine. The life of a Christian is not easy.

Listen again to part of the passage from John 6:

Many of his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?"

Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining, so he said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again?"

The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But some of you do not believe me."

At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?"

Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You [alone] have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God."

May we enjoin with Simon Peter and confess our faith in Jesus Christ – for if we do, backsliding may become a reality of our past and not our future.