

We Have An Anchor!

Lesson 2: Fighting Against The Current



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

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Lesson 2: Fighting Against The Current

Learn about the process, causes, dangers, and cure for gradually drifting away from God

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: DGW149

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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We Have an Anchor!

Fighting Against The Current

There are two major threats to your faithfulness to God. The first is the storms of life that were discussed in lesson 1. There are certainly many times that these storms catch people unprepared and cause people to doubt in the existence of God, discourage people to the point that they give up on serving God, distract people from what is truly important by causing them to get caught up in the moment, etc. These storms include deaths, sickness/disease, persecution, temptations, and many other things.

The second is the current that is at work in the world we live. Just as there is a current in the oceans that work to pull things away from shore little by little, there are forces at work in this world that are trying to pull those who have come to Jesus Christ farther and farther away from Him. And, these forces (unlike the storms of life) often work very gradually over an extended period of time.

Although the storms of life put us in danger of being swept out to sea and becoming lost very quickly or having our vessels destroyed and drowning, the current that we face acts much differently. It is a slower and much more gradual process of pulling us away from God. Therefore, the problem that we face with this current is drifting.

Hebrews 2:1-4 identifies this real threat to our faiths. “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”

Fortunately, the anchor that God has given to us not only helps us to survive the storms of life, but it also helps us fight against the current that is trying to pull us back into the ocean of sin. Hebrews 6:19 says, “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.” This anchor, once again, is the hope of eternal salvation in Heaven through Jesus Christ.

In this second lesson, we need to recognize this additional threat of drifting. Although the storms of life may receive the most attention, the current that we face may be even more dangerous. You see, the storms of life are much easier identified in our daily lives than the current is. The current is working every single day, moment-by-moment, to try to pull you inches farther from the Lord. And, because it works so gradually, it is difficult to perceive when it is happening. To help us think about the danger of drifting, I have selected the text of Hebrews 2:1-4. By using this text as a foundation for our study, we will be able to gain a greater understanding of this threat and how we can fight against it.

The Process Of Drifting

Regarding the threat of drifting away from God’s salvation, please notice that the writer of Hebrews said that “we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away” (Hebrews 2:1). The idea is that we must pay very careful attention to the things that God has said regarding His salvation in the pages of the New

Testament. Therefore, this tells me that the process of drifting is one that is characterized by carelessness. For, it is not that the current is typically so strong that it overpowers a vessel on the sea. Instead, it typically is only dangerous because people are not watching the threat and being as alert as they should be.

Ignore the threat

There are some who treat the threat of drifting as being an irrelevant problem in their lives. Just like those who do not properly anchor their boats because they are in a hurry or because they do not perceive any real threat, there are many people who ignore the threat of drifting in their spiritual lives. “It won’t happen to me” is one of the most dangerous mindsets that we can ever have. Somehow, people think that all the dangers and threats apply to everyone – except them.

So, there are some who live their daily lives completely unaware of the forces that are at work in their lives to pull them away from the Lord. Or, if they are aware of those forces, they think that they are so strong that the current will not be successful. And, it is possible that some have even done a good job being aware of the dangers of drifting in some areas of his/her life, but have completely ignored another area. Yet, Satan and his allies will surely find the area that you have ignored to try to pull you away from the Lord. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Remember that Satan is often not so bold as to present you with a temptation that is easily recognizable. Instead, he will often try to work discretely so that you will not recognize that you are being tempted. In fact, I believe that Satan knows that many Christians will not completely renounce their faith in a single instant because of a single temptation. However, many Christians are not fastened to their anchor so securely that they are not prone to drifting – because they have ignored this threat and all the ways Satan can use this threat against them.

Deny the problem

It has been said that sin takes us farther than we wanted to go and keeps us longer than we wanted to stay. Whenever we ignore the threat of drifting, Satan is sure to use that as an avenue to pull us away from God. Now, just think about how one moment, a boat seems safe, resting partly on the shore. Then, through a process of an almost imperceptible ebb and flow, the boat goes from partly on the shore, to completely in the water, to a few feet off the shore, to a short distance from the shore, to a mile away from the shore, to being out of sight.

Somewhere along in the process, people usually tend to notice. But, sometimes the reality of the problem is not perceived. Many conclude, “There’s nothing wrong” – even though the boat has drifted back into the water. On a spiritual level, I think this same thing happens whenever Satan works to get us to agree to compromise our values inch-by-inch (perhaps not realizing the real impact of what we are doing). Yet, each inch takes us that much farther away from Christ than where we need to be!

I think King David is a good example of this. David is described in the Scriptures as being a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22). Almost certainly, Satan would have had great difficulty in getting this kind of man to go “miles” away from God in a single instant. As you read the Biblical record of this man’s life, you would never suspect that this man would ever commit such wickedness as murder. And, I suppose that Satan recognized the same thing. So, rather than tempting David to commit murder as a first attempt to lure him from God, he began “inching” David from God (as recorded in 2 Samuel 11). First, Satan was successful in getting David to lust after a woman he saw. Second, Satan got David to inquire about her. Third, he got David to send for her after he knew she was another man’s wife. Fourth, he got David to commit adultery with her. Fifth, he got David to act deceptively in trying to cover his sinful tracks. Sixth, whenever David’s plans failed, he got David to effectively murder the woman’s husband. Then, 2 Samuel 12 indicates that David had, apparently, denied the problem. For, it was not until after Nathan

(the prophet) opened David's eyes to the fact that he had left the Lord that David repented.

Justify the situation

There's a point at which the problem of our drifting finally is brought to our attention. Maybe we see it ourselves or maybe someone points it out to us. But, if Satan is to be effective in capturing our souls, he must also convince us to justify the situation. This, to his credit, is where David discontinued his drifting and returned to the Lord. Rather than justifying his sin, he embraced his sin and corrected it.

Yet, there are many people who will justify their drifting and continue to inch farther and farther away from God. They often think, "It happens to all of us." Or, "I'm not *that* far away." So, rather than viewing all of the steps of their digression as being a departure from the safety of the shore and being spiritually dead, they have now viewed their sin as being "no big deal."

David's predecessor, King Saul, is an example of one who justified his drifting. God had commanded Saul to "utterly destroy" all the Amalekites and the things they had (1 Samuel 15:1-3). Yet, Saul and the people "spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed" (1 Samuel 15:9). Whenever God confronted Saul about this digression, Saul first denied that he had done anything wrong by saying that he had obeyed God's commandment (1 Samuel 15:13). Then, he attempted to justify the situation by claiming that he was going to sacrifice what he had spared to the Lord (1 Samuel 15:15). Yet, God was not pleased with his justification!

Embrace the new reality

The final stage of drifting is fully embracing the new reality. Although it is possible to stay in the previous stages of being ignorant of the threat, denying the problem, or justifying the situation, at some point, many people do eventually look up long enough to notice that they have drifted. Yet, there are many who just embrace their new reality rather than

seek to correct it. By this time, they may have drifted so far away from the Lord that they will just claim that their lives have gone in a "new direction."

Some who reach this point believe that they have been "enlightened" and "progressed" in their thinking. Now, they have new goals and new morals as their lives have experienced a complete transformation. However, rather than becoming enlightened, they have actually went into darkness. Rather than making progress, they have actually digressed. And, rather than making a transformation, they have decayed into their previous condition of living in sin (or have even went to a point that is worse than where they were before).

Maybe there is no better example than Judas Iscariot. Here is a man who was one of Jesus' twelve apostles. He spent time in close proximity to Jesus. He would have heard Jesus teach, saw Jesus' love and compassion, and witnessed Jesus' miracles. Yet, Satan was able to enter Judas' heart so that Judas went to the enemies of Jesus and conspired with them to betray Him for thirty pieces of silver. At the appropriate time, Judas led a mob of Jesus' enemies to arrest Him and identified Jesus to them by kissing Him. Then, Jesus was led away and would have the sentence of death put on Him by the Jews. Whenever Judas saw that Jesus had been condemned, he was "remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver" and proceeded to go out and hang himself (Matthew 27:3-10). Judas saw that he was partly responsible for the death of Jesus. To his credit, he returned the money. But, whenever he looked up and saw that he had drifted so far from God, he considered his new reality so hopeless that he compounded sin upon sin by killing Himself.

The Causes Of Drifting

Satan wants to catch us in the currents of life and cause us to drift away from God. And, he does not want us to recognize the problem until we think it's too late to change or until we are so set in our "new" ways that we simply will not change. So, rather than getting caught up in this process we need to recognize that God warns us about drifting away

(Hebrews 2:1-4) and determine to be aware of the causes of drifting in our own lives. Therefore, let's consider a sample of what the "current" (tide) that is attempting to pull us from the shore looks like in our lives.

False religious teaching

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 says, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

One of the most effective ways that Satan can work to draw true Christians away from Jesus Christ is through false religious teaching and practices. You see, Satan is perfectly okay with you being religious and considering yourself a "Christian," as long as you are not actually living in faithful obedience to Jesus Christ. Today, Satan tries to "inch" Christians away from Jesus Christ by exposing them to teachings that claim to be from the Bible, but really are not. So, Satan gets Christians to read the newest and most popular "Christian" books or listen to the most popular "Christian" teachers who will teach some truth, while mixing in a few false doctrines and ideas as well. Or, he will convince Christians that it will not hurt to attend the assemblies of churches that are practicing and teaching things that are not according to God's standard of truth.

At first, perhaps the Christian is on guard when he/she listens to these things. But, through constant exposure to false ideas, many Christians (and entire churches) begin to drift away from the truth. Their morality begins to reflect more and more of what the denominations accept, the language they use is less and less according to Scripture, there is a greater acceptance of the people who are part of man-made churches, and there is less of an emphasis placed on the doctrine of Jesus Christ and the New Testament pattern.

Worldly "wisdom"

1 Corinthians 1:18-21 says, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

Satan loves to convince people that they know better than God does. So, Satan tries to get those who are Christians to accept the "wisdom" that the world offers. This "wisdom" is being taught all around us. It is in the schools, it is in the media, it is being shared with us by our friends and family members, and everywhere we look. Those who are not following Jesus Christ have determined that they know best regarding how this world came into existence and how life originated. They think they know what will produce a happy life better than God does. They think they know the meaning of life on earth better than God. And, they think they can determine what is right and what is wrong without God.

At first, those who are Christians may not be willing to accept some of the more extreme beliefs of those who are not Christians. But, through constant exposure to these false ideas, many Christians begin to drift away from the truth that God has revealed and the moral standard that He approves. They begin to accept some of the conclusions offered by the "scientific" community that undermines the Biblical record of creation. They begin to focus more on the pursuit of happiness, success, and purpose through wealth, earthly pleasures, earthly relationships, community involvement, and improving the world physically than they do on living for Jesus and leading others to Him. And, they start to combine the standard of morality that the world accepts with their "Christian" faith.

Peers

1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’” Proverbs 1:10 says, “My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.” Proverbs 1:15 says, “My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path.”

One of the ways that Satan gets us used to the kinds of new ideas, situations, and experiences offered by the world is through the people who are around us. Whether it be our family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, classmates, or someone else, the people who are around us and come into regular contact with us have a way of influencing us – for the good or the bad. Certainly, if these people have not fully embraced the truths contained in the Bible, then they will influence us in the opposite direction.

At first, those who are Christians may not be willing to accept some of their more extreme invitations to engage in sin. But, through constant pressure by the peers we want to be accepted by, the more willing many become to compromise the truth and practice error. Maybe a girlfriend or boyfriend wants you to go just a little farther than you are comfortable going. Maybe an unbelieving spouse gets you to go to his/her church “just once.” Maybe a co-worker pressures you into going to a ballgame rather than church services. Maybe a classmate pressures you into having “just one” drink of alcohol. Then, once you have done that “one” thing, the pressure is on to do the next thing. Or, another one of your peers is pressuring you to do something else entirely that is pulling you one inch farther away from God than you have already went.

Culture

John 15:18-19 says, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

The ways of the world are different from the ways of God (see 1 John 2:15-17). This is true about any culture in any community at any point in time.

The fact of the matter is that Christians live in this world, but they must not be “of” this world. That is, they must choose to live differently than the world lives and think differently than the world thinks (Romans 12:2). Yet, because the ways of the world are different from God’s ways, the world will hate those who follow Jesus Christ and try to pressure them to change (sometimes even through violent persecution). So, Christians face the constant pressure of living in a world that is not interested in serving Jesus Christ.

At first, those who are Christians may recognize the fact that the ways of the world are different from what they stand for as Christians. But, over time, the world can pressure Christians into becoming desensitized to wickedness. One of the most effective ways that the world is now inching Christians away from Jesus Christ is through media in culture. So, as Christians watch television programs and movies that are written and produced by those who do not share all of their values, they are introduced to new ideas that are contrary to the ways of God. The same is true with regard to music, books, magazines, blogs, games, etc. Very slowly, sin is presented as being “not so bad” – and, actually, kind of enjoyable. Over time and exposure to various elements within a sinful culture, Christians can find their values and beliefs completely changed to look more and more like the world.

The “daily grind”

Hebrews 11:24-26 says, “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.”

While the causes of drifting I have identified up to this point may seem somewhat obvious, let’s focus now on one that may not be quite so obvious. While we live in this world, it is very easy to get consumed by the “things” that make up our earthly lives so that we lose sight of what really matters. Moses could have done this. He was the adopted grandson of the king of Egypt. He could have just enjoyed the pleasures of being part of a royal family

and tried to excel in Egyptian politics. But, he made a choice concerning what really mattered. And, that choice was to serve God!

At first, those who are Christians may have strong morals and priorities. However, as bills mount, maybe we put our jobs ahead of God, attending church services, or fulfilling the roles in our families “just until we can catch up and get a little bit ahead.” As we run from one activity to another activity for our children, maybe we fail to study the Bible, teach our children the ways of God, pray, be involved in teaching the gospel, attend church services, etc. as we should “until things calm down.” The point is that it is very easy to make one compromise after another with very little thought while we react to the daily grind of living life on this earth. However, Christians must make a choice to serve the Lord first rather than getting caught up in this constant drift away from God!

The Dangers Of Drifting

There are forces at work in this world to pull us, inch by inch, away from God. We have already seen that one of the reasons why this is so dangerous is that it is difficult to notice each one of these digressions away from God. So, drifting can result in people being away from God and not even realizing it! But, there are also some other dangers that are involved in drifting. Two that we should consider are identified in Hebrews 2:1-4.

We will receive a just punishment

Listen to Hebrews 2:2-4 again. “For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”

The point is that of comparison between those who did not obey the Law of Moses (which was spoken through angels, see Galatians 3:19) and those

who do not obey the new law of Jesus Christ because they drift away from it. The Hebrew writer calls to our minds the fact that those who did not obey the Law of Moses in the Old Testament were punished appropriately for their sins. Think about Nadab and Abihu being destroyed by fire from God for using fire from an unauthorized source in a sacrifice (Leviticus 10:1-2). Think about Korah and those who rebelled against God with him being swallowed by the earth (Numbers 16). Think about Jonah being swallowed by a great fish whenever he disobeyed God’s commandment (Jonah 1-2). There are many examples.

Then, the point is that if those who disobeyed the Law of Moses (which was spoken through angels) were appropriately punished in these ways, certainly we should expect to be punished appropriately (receive a “just reward”) if we neglect the salvation that has been brought through Jesus Christ and drift away. Yes, God has promised that those who are not faithful to Him will spend eternity in Hell fire. Revelation 21:8 says, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Neglect God’s great salvation

Part of what the punishment those who drift away from God will be due is the result of neglecting the great salvation that Jesus Christ has made possible and that the gospel describes. This “great salvation” is the opportunity to live eternally in Heaven with God rather than spend eternity in the torments of Hell fire!

Surely, then, those who had once tasted the salvation offered by Jesus Christ and drifted away from it so as to be eternally lost in Hell fire will experience a “worse punishment” than others because they will know that they forfeited salvation for things on the earth! Although the fires of Hell will burn just as hot for others as it will for these Christians who drifted from Christ, the anguish will likely be intensified because of the knowledge of what they gave up.

Listen to Hebrews 10:26-31, recognizing that it addresses those who had once been Christians, but drifted away from Him. “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

The Cure For Drifting

Drifting is not only dangerous, it is spiritually deadly. It is the cause for many people losing their souls and spending eternity in Hell fire. But, what is the cure for drifting? Consider two points.

Be observant

As we have seen, one of the problems involved in drifting is that it is difficult to recognize that we are drifting whenever it is happening. So, we need to practice regular and honest self-examination in order to see whether or not we have drifted from God. 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified.” We need to make these self-evaluations, to look up from the individual “moments” in our lives and see the trajectory our lives are on. Are they headed toward God and growing in our faith (according to what God has revealed in the Bible), or are they headed away from Him? But, these evaluations must be performed with complete honesty – for they will not help us if we deceive ourselves.

Consider a few “warning signs” that we are drifting. First, those who are falling “asleep” (spiritually) are drifting. God wants us to be “awake” and living zealously for Him (Ephesians 5:15). So, if you are becoming complacent in your spiritual life and find yourself less interested in spiritual things than you once were, know that you are drifting. Maybe it’s easier for you to miss church services than it once was. Maybe it’s not as important for you to pray or study your Bible as it used to be. Maybe you are not as careful about the way you dress or the way you talk as you once were.

Second, those who stop exposing sin and start fellowshiping sin are drifting. God wants us to have no fellowship with the “unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Ephesians 5:11). So, if you are becoming more accepting of the sinful things that are going on around you, you are drifting. Maybe being around profanity doesn’t bother you as much as it should. Maybe seeing people immodestly dressed doesn’t concern you very much anymore. Maybe homosexuality, adultery, and sexual relations outside of marriage do not seem quite as bad as God says they are. Maybe you are even a little more comfortable being around people who are actively engaged in sinful things.

Third, those who stop bearing fruit for God are drifting. God expects His people to bear fruit that is pleasing to Him (see John 15:1-8). So, if you are not involved in the good things God commands you to be involved in, you are drifting. Maybe you do not do anything to teach those who are lost about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Maybe you do not visit the people who are lonely and in need. Maybe you don’t help people you have the opportunity to help. Maybe you don’t read your Bible every day. Maybe you don’t pray like God wants you to pray. Maybe you don’t attend church services as often as God wants you to. Maybe you aren’t being kind. Maybe you aren’t showing love toward all people. Maybe you aren’t willing to forgive. Maybe you aren’t being patient.

Be careful

Whenever you observe the fact that you are drifting you need to exercise careful diligence to return to the Lord completely. Hebrews 2:1 says,

“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.” Careful attention must be given to our present situation if we have drifted. Just as carelessness is behind our drifting away, carefulness is the key to returning to Christ. It will take great effort to return to Jesus Christ. Remember, the currents in this world pull us away from Christ, not toward Him. So, we will need to get to work rowing against the current of life, holding to the truths that God has revealed in His word.

We must be careful to make the necessary corrections to the areas in which we have sinned. Honestly evaluate the areas of sin that are in your life and change them – no matter the cost! Determine not to accept the “wisdom” or ways of this world as a standard for how you live your life. Even if you must go against those you love, be careful to observe God’s commands! Those who have drifted away from Christ are told that they must repent of their sins, confess their sins to God, and ask Him for forgiveness (see Acts 8:22 and 1 John 1:8-2:2). Those who have sinned in a public way should also confess their sins to those knowledgeable of them (i.e. James 5:16).

We must also be careful to do the things God wants us to do. God doesn’t just want you to *avoid* doing some things. He also wants you *to do* some things. He wants you to study His word every day. He wants you to join a faithful local church and attend all the assemblies that you possibly can. He wants you to teach people the gospel. He wants you to do good to others. He wants you to let your light shine. There are many things you must be careful to do.

Then, we must be careful to anchor ourselves in hope. Once you return from drifting, you must put your anchor down firmly so that you will not get caught up in the current again! Remember, we have an anchor for the soul that is both sure and steadfast (Hebrews 6:19)!

Conclusion

The currents of this life are trying to pull every Christian away from God. Some currents are stronger than others. But, as we learn from Hebrews 2:1-4, it is possible to refuse to get caught up in the currents – and live for Jesus. If we will cast our anchors and hold firmly to them, we will not be caught drifting when our lives on this earth end!

Study Questions

What are the two major threats to your faithfulness to God?

1. The Process Of Drifting

Who can you ignore the threat of drifting?

How can you deny the problem of drifting?

How can you justify your drifting?

How can you embrace the new reality brought about by your drifting?

2. The Causes Of Drifting

How can false religious teaching cause you to drift?

How will carefulness help you correct and avoid drifting?

How can worldly “wisdom” cause you to drift?

How can your peers cause you to drift?

How can culture cause you to drift?

How can the “daily grind” cause you to drift?

3. The Dangers Of Drifting

What kind of punishment will drifters receive?

What salvation have drifters neglected?

4. The Cure For Drifting

How can you know whether you are drifting? What are some warning signs?