

Ezekiel 37:15-28 Backsliding

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[0 : 00] Well, as I mentioned during the reading this morning, we were looking at the first half of Ezekiel chapter 37. Tonight I want us to spend some time focusing on the second half of the chapter. We'll look at the whole section from verse 15 to 28, but we can read again at verse 23.

They shall not defile themselves any more with their idols and their detestable things or with any of their transgressions, but I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned and will cleanse them, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

And in particular tonight I want us to think about this issue that is mentioned in this text, the issue of backsliding. It's a subject that we probably don't talk about very often, and yet at the same time it's something that really in one way or another affects us all as God's people. To a greater or lesser degree, every one of us stumbles in our faith. We all come to faith, and from that point God starts a work in us where we press on, but it's not always the case that we just get better and better and better and better. Sometimes we stumble, sometimes we wobble, sometimes that can be outwardly, sometimes it can be inwardly and nobody knows about it. But yet for us all, the Christian life is a battle, and backsliding is something that can affect us all. So it's something that affects us all, and of course even for those of us who are maybe getting on better, it's of course a danger and something that we must think about. So it's a very, very important subject to think about, and Ezekiel 37 has got some wonderful things to teach us. Now before we go into it in a little more detail, I want to just comment on the translation of this verse, because if any of you have an authorized version in front of you, you will see that it says, I will save them out of all their dwelling places. So you can see the difference.

ESV, I will save them from all the backsliding in which they've sinned. King James Version or authorized version, I will save them out of all their dwelling places wherein they have sinned. The reason for that is that the Hebrew word for backsliding and the Hebrew word for dwelling places is almost identical. The two words are immense, are very, very, very, very similar. And you can see if you have an ESV, the footnote mentions the fact that some manuscripts will have the word for dwelling places, some manuscripts have the word for backslidings. One of the reasons why the word backslidings is preferred is because that is how the Greek scholars who translated the New Testament into Greek around 300 BC when they wrote what we call a Septuagint, they obviously had a manuscript that had the word backslidings because that's the word that they've used in the Greek. So that's why there's a difference if you've got a King James Version in front of you, but really the difference is not that important because both words convey exactly the same thing.

This verse is talking about people who spiritually speaking have gone into a bad place and that's exactly what it means to be backslidden. So what are these verses saying? Well, first of all we need to think about the context of Ezekiel and in terms of the prophecy that we have before us, God is giving a message which is describing the reunification of the people of Israel. As we mentioned this morning in the year 931 BC when David's grandson Rehoboam became king, Israel split in two. And I've got a map here that you can see.

[4 : 10] The pinkish area to the south is the southern kingdom of Judah. That was made up of the tribe of Judah along with the tribe of Benjamin. The northern kingdom was the other 10 tribes which came to be known as Israel. Now the whole area, the pink and the blue area, that was the kingdom under David and Solomon. But when Rehoboam came to the throne there was a division. And so the 10 tribes in the north grouped together and the dominant tribe was the tribe of Ephraim. So quite often in the Old Testament it will refer to the northern kingdom as Ephraim because that was the dominant tribe. And in the south the main tribe was Judah and it was there in the south that the Davidic line was continued. In other words all of David's descendants stayed on the throne in Judah. In the north you had various dynasties as there was assassinations and coups and

overthrows and all sorts of chaos. So the kingdom split in two. By the time that Ezekiel was a prophet the northern kingdom had long since been obliterated by the Assyrians. The Assyrians would have come from the north and they came down and conquered the northern kingdom and obliterated it. That was in the year 722 BC when Isaiah and Hosea were prophets. By the time Ezekiel was prophesying as we said this morning the southern kingdom of Judah was in the process of being conquered by the Babylonians.

This is around the year 598 to 586 BC. That was when Jeremiah was a prophet. It was also when Daniel was taken as one of the captives. So Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel they're all at the same time, same period of history. And so at this point in the history of Israel when Ezekiel is a prophet the kingdom has been divided for 340 years. The northern kingdom has been non-existent for 130 years and the southern kingdom is in the process of being reduced to rubble and dragged into exile. And when we remind ourselves of that context the fact that it's being ripped apart. Again we said this morning you look at Iraq today being ripped apart. That's a similar situation that Israel faced. It was a low point in the history of Israel but when we read the words of Ezekiel 37 in the second half we see that God is giving them the most astounding message of restoration. Look again at what it says in the verses. From 15 to 19 it's describing the reunification of Israel. He says take a stick right on it Ephraim. That's the dominant tribe in the northern kingdom. So that's what it's referring to the northern kingdom. Take another stick and write on it Judah.

So basically two sticks, two kingdoms. And what does Ezekiel told them to do? Join the sticks together so that it'll be no longer two kingdoms but they will be made one in his hand. And that's the picture that's being presented. That division is going to be undone.

Then in verse 20 and 21 it says that God is going to bring them back into their own land. Remember northern kingdom absolutely obliterated. Southern kingdom being dragged into exile in Babylon. The whole area of Judea is lying in ruins and God says I will bring you back.

It's a message of restoration. And then in verse 22 to 23 there is this promise to establish a united kingdom. The people have been brought back from their backsliding and a covenant relationship has been beautifully restored. I will make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all and there shall be no longer two nations and no longer divided into two kingdoms. They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things or with any of their transgressions.

[8 : 27] And I will save them from all their backslidings in which they have sinned and will cleanse them and they shall be my people and I will be their God. Ezekiel as we said this morning is prophesying to a nation at rock bottom and God's message is this. I will restore you. It's an amazing message of hope in these verses. Now imagine you were an Israelite in Babylon. You'd been taken to captive in what we would call Iraq. You're miles from home. You're hearing all these accounts of the devastation and you're basically a refugee.

You're at exile. Everything seems a mess. Imagine you were hearing Ezekiel say this. You would be thinking, wow, one day, one day we'll be back in Jerusalem. One day we'll be back in our own land. One day we'll be two, we'll be a united nation again. One day we'll have our own king and everything will be back to the way it was. And so you'd be thinking, wow, what an amazing message this is. We're going to be back to the days of David when everything looks so good. And for an Israelite that would have sounded wonderful.

But do you know the amazing thing is that God's plan of restoration was far greater than that. Because the ultimate fulfillment of what Ezekiel is saying did not come when the remnant started returning to Judah in 538 BC. The ultimate fulfillment of this is in the Persian and work of Jesus Christ. And he has come, not as king of Palestine, remember that was what the initial people thought. They thought he's going to come and restore the kingdom to Israel. He'll drive out the Romans. He will make us back to what we were in the time of David. He's going to be a great king of the land of Judea. No, no, no. Jesus has come as king of the universe, exalted at the right hand of the Father. And Jesus has done a work of unification, not just of the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, but he has united Jew and Gentiles so that all people from all nations are being called into the kingdom of God. And in Christ, God is not simply restoring exiles and taking them from Iraq back to Palestine, but he is reconciling the whole world to himself. God is establishing his people. And Ezekiel is pointing us towards that glorious work of restoration that finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. But for these Israelites who were listening to Ezekiel, they were in exile. They were in a really bad place. They had been so privileged, hadn't they? God had given them so

much, blessed them with kings, with land, with prophets. God had defended them from enemy attack. God had made their land prosper and yet they had refused to remain faithful to the Lord. And despite the countless warnings that the prophets gave, always remember, prophets are like warning men. That's really their role. Read through the whole of the Old Testament, prophets came to warn, warn, warn, warn the people. And yet they didn't listen. They were a people who had failed spectacularly. In other words, they were badly backslidden. And that's what I want us to think about tonight for a wee while. And I want us to focus on two areas that are highlighted in this chapter. First of all, we're going to look at the causes of backsliding. And then we're going to look at the response to backsliding. So first of all, what can cause backsliding? Well, if we look a little bit more closely at these verses, we can see that there are four key danger areas that are either directly stated or indirectly implied in this passage of scripture that we are reading. If we go back to verse 21 and the first half of it, we see that Ezekiel warns us against bad influences. It says, then say to them, thus says the Lord God, behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone. Now, literally, this was a reality for Israel, as we were saying, they had been plucked out of their land and brought into a foreign nation as hostages.

But for centuries, these nations had been a snare in the lives of God's people, because Israel had constantly and repeatedly been lured away by the temptation of following the bad influence of the surrounding nations. You have Israel there, and they are surrounded by nations. And all of those nations were indulging in all sorts of practices, particularly in idolatry. And Israel kept looking, kept looking at what they were doing, and kept on wanting to be like them. And from the very beginning, God had been warning them about that. You go back to judges. So this is us going back over 600 years. It says, the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Bales, and they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out from the land of Egypt. They went after other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them and bowed down to them, and they provoked the Lord to anger. If you were really to sum up the one great sin of Israel in the Old Testament, that was it. They followed the false gods of the nations around them. And the pattern is constantly repeated. God continually blessed them, helped them, taught them, protected them, provided for them, and yet again and again and again, they looked at the nations around them and they thought, let's be like them. Let's do what they are doing. And through the bad influence of these other nations, who worshiped false gods and who engaged in all sorts of immoral behaviour, individuals like Samson, Solomon and Ahab fell into a mess, and at times nearly the whole nation was led astray. The Israelites were backslidden because they had all too often followed the bad influence of the people around them. And of course that's a lesson that still applies, isn't it? And we are being shown that all of us have to take care in regard to the company that we keep. And it's one of the big challenges of the Christian life, that we have to maintain that vital balance of being soft and light in the world, and yet at the same time not losing our saltiness. We want to be in contact with the world, but we want to make sure that we don't become like the world. And often in terms of the Christian life, you see two extremes. On the one hand you see people who say you must have nothing to do with anything that is remotely perceived as worldly. You must have no contact with football or music or literature or television or people, activities, community life, you must have nothing to do with that. Some people go to that extreme. Other people go to the completely opposite extreme and they say you can pretty much do whatever you like. Go wherever you want to go and do whatever you want to do. And the key point is that neither of these extremes are biblical, neither of them, because it is a biblical imperative that we have contact with the Lord and it is with the world, but it is also a biblical imperative that we avoid sinful practices. And that's exactly what Jesus sums up perfectly in his prayer. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

And this is the balance that we have to maintain as Christians. We are in contact with the world, but we must make sure that we do not get lured by the world's practices. And the reality is that it's so easy to slip back if we spend too much time with people who have no regard for God and we can all too easily find ourselves doing the same things that they do. Now I want to be very clear, I am absolutely not saying that you should not have non-Christian friends. I would urge you all to have non-Christian friends. Urge you to have contact with people who aren't Christians because that's how you will lead them to salvation by having contact with them. And so I'm not saying to have no contact with these people. I would always say the opposite, build up relationships with non-Christians.

[18 : 28] But the vital question that you and I have to ask ourselves is this, are you different?

There were probably many, many Israelites living in the various nations at this time and yet they blended in perfectly. And if you or I can blend in perfectly with people who drink too much or with people who gossip or with people who can't control their temper or with people who make a God out of money or out of their work or out of their home, if we blend in perfectly then that's when we've got to be careful because as Christians we should always be different. Always saints in the world, saints who are in the world.

If you're a saint you're different but you've got to be in the world, in contact with the world but different. Backsliding is such an easy tap to fall into because there is a whole world around us that wants us to slip. It's all too ready to help us to slip. But don't think for one moment that the devil doesn't know that. You think of the devil, you think of all the things that the devil influences. You think of media, you think of just the stuff that gets put under your nose every day, every day. The temptation to sin is just being placed in front of you by the devil all the time, all the time, every day. And that's why we've got to be on guard. We've got to be careful of the company we keep.

The next danger highlighted is in the second half of verse 21 and the first half of verse 22. Here we see the danger of being dispersed. Thus says the Lord God, behold I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone and will gather them from all around and bring them into their own land and I will make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel. Israel's problem was not simply that it had been drawn closer to the influence of the surrounding nations. It was also that they had been drawn away from each other. The kingdom had divided and by the time Isaiah was a prophet, the kingdoms were at war with each other. Imagine that. You think of the people of Israel coming out of Egypt. You think what are united people drawn out of Egypt together with God performing amazing, miraculous works and in about three or four hundred years time they're at war against each other. And eventually they were divided, scattered and isolated. And that's something that can so easily happen to us as Christians. We are tempted by the world and at the same time we are drawn away from church, drawn away from fellowship, drawn away from brothers and sisters in Christ. And of course that's why the devil loves, loves, loves to bring division in the Christian church where we are separated from one another, we are isolated and very often we can find ourselves keeping away from God's people.

And we end up in this horrible cycle where, where, where the more you stay away the harder it is to come back. And in that kind of situation we are more vulnerable to the danger of back sliding. And this is reminding us of one of the most basic and yet vital principles of Christianity that from the very moment that you are saved, from the very moment we are converted until the day that we enter glory, we need each other. We all need each other.

[22 : 47] We need each other's encouragement, we need each other's prayers, we need each other's support, we need each other's company, we need each other's friendship, we need each other's guidance. God has made us a family and families need each other. Families need one another. A family is meant to stick together. And that's why it's so important as a congregation to spend time together, to spend time worshiping together, to spend time praying together, to spend time eating together, talking together, laughing together, crying together. And we cry together this weekend, don't we? But we do it together. Because the foundational rule of our relationship as Christians is that we love each other. And that involves being together. And that is why, and please I want you to write these words in your heart, that is why you should never ever, there are no circumstances whatsoever when you should say to yourself, I should stay away from church. Never through. Never. Even if you've made a massive mistake in your life. Never ever think, I should stay away. Our door is always open. Always, always, always open. Because God's arms are always open. So never ever think that. We've been reminded of the danger of being dispersed and isolated. It's always vital to stick together as God's people. The third danger highlighted is the danger of divided loyalties. That's highlighted in the rest of verse 22. I will make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel and one king shall be king over them all and they shall no longer be two nations and no longer divided into two kingdoms. When the kingdom divided in 931 BC, that meant that there were two kings. There was Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. There was Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. He was in the north, Rehoboam was in the south. And from that moment onwards, the loyalties of Israel were divided and the country was split. But in God's promise of restoration in this chapter, these divided loyalties would be gone and there will be one king over them. And at the heart of being a Christian is the fact that we have one king, Jesus Christ. And we have to make sure that we are on guard against allowing anything or anyone else to take his place as king and

Lord in our lives. Jesus himself warns about this. He says, no one can serve two masters. For he'll either hate the one and love the other or he'll be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. It's a fundamental principle that our loyalties can't be divided. And we all run the risk of backsliding if we allow anything other than Jesus to be our master. And yet there are so many potential masters just waiting to bring us into slavery. Money, a career, alcohol or some other addiction, status, sexual sin. And that was a massive part of the false religions that the Israelites fell into. Our possessions, our reputation, even our hobbies, even our hobbies, we can become a slave to these things. Of course, all of these things are good in their right place, but they can all become our master. And when they do, they can cause us to backslide. I remember about almost 20 years ago, you know, it's so strange talking about something in my life that's 20 years ago, because that was something that only old people would say 20 years ago. Now I remember saying 20 years ago, I remember 20 years ago speaking to a friend on the phone and he had recently basically turned us back on the Christian faith. And he said to me that he felt a lot freer because he had stopped following Jesus. That was about 20 years ago, maybe just 18, 20 years ago. A few months ago, I picked him up as he staggered along the road, hopelessly drunk. He wasn't free at all. He was some desperate bondage to alcohol. And despite saying all those years ago, I feel a lot freer. He was just walking into slavery that has ravaged his life for 20 years. We must guard against divided loyalties. And then lastly, verse 23 highlights really what lies at the heart of backsliding. They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things or with any of their transgressions. Ultimately, this was Israel's problem. They had fallen into idolatry. They had replaced God with something else. They had turned away from his ways. [28 : 47] They had been lured away by the temptation of sin. And God forbid that we ever think that that will never happen to us. Because the world is constantly prodding us with temptations, isn't it? The world is constantly prodding us to indulge in sin, to harbour resentment, to put ourselves first, to give ourselves a moment's pleasure, to push God to one side.

This is a constant battle, which of course is why Jesus said, pray, lead us not into temptation. And I'm not saying any of this to sound judgmental at all. Every single one of us faces temptation, me probably more than all. Every single one of us struggles with sin, including me. Every single one of us could backslide, including me. But if we heed these warnings, if we're careful about the company we keep, if we stick together as a family of believers, if we make sure our loyalties are never divided and are always with Jesus, and if we guard our hearts against idolatry every day, then it will help us to keep following Jesus on that narrow path. There's a lot to learn here about the causes of backsliding.

But what happens if we do backslide? That's our second question tonight. What is the response to backsliding? Now we all know that it's a very distressing thing when a professing Christian slips and falls back. It's distressing for the church, it's distressing for the family and friends of the individual, and it's immensely distressing for the person themselves. And we need to ask ourselves, what should our response be to that? And in that situation, it's very easy to think, well, a person like that should be rejected from the church. And Christians should be careful to avoid somebody like that. And we will often find that we may well be very critical of somebody who has backslidden. And maybe people here have experienced that themselves. But the amazing thing about Ezekiel 37 is that it tells us what God wants to do with a backslider. And do you know it's quite amazing what we discover? That brings us to verses 23 to 28. And if you look at these few verses, you will discover eight things that God wants to do with backsliders. Now I'll go through all eight very quickly. But every one of them is just amazing. Number one, God wants to save the backslider. Verse 23, we see that they shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned. Now, the biblical word to save basically means to rescue. So if somebody has slipped back, if somebody has stumbled, if you have maybe mucked up as a Christian and you found yourself in a place that you should not be, then God's great desire is to rescue you. In God's eyes, the backslider does not need rejecting or criticizing or abandoning the backslider needs rescuing. And that is such an amazing comfort for every single one of us. Because if your friend is backslidden, if your relative is backslidden, if you are backslidden, then God's number one priority is to come to the rescue. God wants to save any who have stumbled in their faith. Secondly, we see that God wants to cleanse them and will cleanse them. It says there in verse 23, people who backslide often end up in a mess

and their lives are very often full of things that shouldn't be there.

Maybe there's outward sin, maybe there's inward defilement and all too often there's just an all round mess and brokenness and God's great desire is to clean up that mess, to bind up every wound, to heal every scar, to put right all that has gone wrong. Notice it does not say that the Israelites need to get themselves cleaned up first, as if we need to sort ourselves out before God will accept us again. It doesn't say clean yourselves.

[34 : 46] It says I will cleanse them. Isn't that incredible? Isn't that absolutely incredible? The God of all glory and purity is ready and willing to cleanse you and me from the mess that you may have found yourself in. We stumble in our faith, we muck up, we muck up and we all do. Every one of us, none of us is excluded from the category of backsliding and yet God says I'll cleanse you. I'll help you. God is absolutely amazing. The third thing that God wants to do with a backslider is that he wants to be their king. See that in verse 24, my servant David shall be king over them. Now David has been dead for about, oh I have to do my arithmetic here, about 400 something years. And so of course this is not referring to David from the Old Testament. It's referring to the true Davidic king, the son of David,

Jesus Christ himself. And God wants to be our king. Backsliding all too often involves a failure to follow Jesus as our Lord and our king. So basically Jesus is our king. We say to Jesus, I love you, I want to serve you, I want you to be my Lord. We are back on this Christian life and then we wander off. Then we stumble and we take our eyes off him and yet God never responds with revenge. He never responds with resentment. He says I still want to be your king. And what is even more amazing is that in the Old Testament context, being king did not just mean being ruler. When we think king, we think ruler. But in the Old Testament context, being king meant that you were the protector, the defender and the one who provided for the needs of the people. A king had to look after every single person under his care. And so when God says he wants to be king of the one who has stumbled in their faith, he is saying that he is willing and ready to restore you, to defend you, to provide for you and to be everything that you will ever need. And remember that's exactly what the father did to the prodigal son who came home. Remember the prodigal son came home and he says, just make me a servant. And the father says, no way. I will give you everything that you need. I'll put a ring on your finger, clothes on your back and we will have a feast to celebrate the fact that you have returned. God wants to be a king.

Fourthly, God wants to be a shepherd. That's the very next thing. My servant, David shall be king over them and they shall have one shepherd. That should immediately remind us of the parable of the lost sheep. Supposing the church here was full to capacity apart from one seat, where one person had wandered, God would be seeking for that individual.

And as a shepherd knows his flock and wants to care for them and protect them and look after them, so God wants to bring back his wandering children into his fold. And it's an incredible description of God's faithfulness. As shepherd and king, he wants to come and protect us, guide us and set us on the right path. That's why it says in the very next sentence, they shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. That's not because God wants to lord it over us, it's because God wants to keep us from backsliding again. He gives us his word, his commands to keep us and to protect us. We're not even halfway through what God says. Number five, we see in verse 25, God wants to bring them to a place where they belong. They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob.

The great tragedy of backsliding is that we wander off and all too often when it happens we feel lost and isolated and lonely. And God's great desire is simply to take us back home to himself, to take us back where we belong, with our father, with our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. That's why the backslider must never think I can never, ever, ever go back. They must never think that because when God brings a backslider back, he is bringing them back to the place where they belong. The place where they belong. And God welcomes us back, he welcomes us back with such love and care and gentleness. He wants to give us a place where we belong. Number six, we see in verse 26, God wants to give us peace. I will make a covenant of peace with them. When we wander away from God, it's not long before our peace is lost. We feel a sense of shame for our mistakes. We feel a sense of frustration that we've fallen into the temptation of sin and we feel lonely because we think I've been mocked up and I've been there and sure every Christian has been there. And if you find yourself in that situation, what does God want to give you? He wants to give you peace. He promised that Israelites are covenant of peace. He wants to give the backslider peace. Verse 27

tells us the next thing that God wants to do, he wants to dwell with them.

[41 : 08] And that's even, I think that's even more amazing. The backslider is in their condition because they've wandered away from God. In other words, they don't want to be with God. Something has pulled them away for whatever reason, they have wandered away from God and there seems to have been a distance and yet God is saying, I want to be with you. I want to dwell with you. And so if we are stumbling in our faith, if we are struggling, then these words need to be written on our hearts that even though we wander away from God, even though we take our eyes off him, yet he still wants to dwell with us, still wants to be with you. So think about something in the last week or the last month or the last year where you've maybe stumbled as a Christian. God's saying, I still want to be with you. I still want to dwell with you. I still want to remain by your side. And that is surely what the

Bible means when it says that the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding instead fast love. So seven things God wants to save them. God wants to cleanse them. God wants to be their king. God wants to be their shepherd. God wants to bring them to a place where they belong. God wants to give them peace. God wants to dwell with them. And last of all, God wants to be their God. Israel were the most unbelievably horrendous failure.

Unbelievably hopelessly useless rubbish failure. At this time, and God says, I will be their God and they shall be my people. And do you know that is what we all need more than anything else? We need God as our God. And there is nothing more amazing and more wonderful to live your life in that glorious relationship that Jesus Christ has made possible for us whereby God is our God and we are his people. That's what God wants for us all. And that's what God wants for someone who is struggling as a Christian. And all of this is teaching us the most astounding truth that you take somebody who has mucked up and wandered, drifted, probably indulged in all sorts of stupid sins and got themselves tangled up in a mess of rubbish in the world. And God's response to that person is a glorious message of hope, comfort, compassion, invitation, encouragement and steadfast, steadfast love. It's almost unbelievable. And yet it's the truth. And of course, if that's how God reacts to backsliders, it's surely how we must react as well. So for all of us that is teaching here, that's really important. If you are a Christian who is progressing well, thanks be to God. But at all times we must be on guard. We must take heed to the warning signs that are highlighted in this chapter. The Christian life is a battle from start to finish and we must be on guard.

If you know somebody who is backslidden, then you can tell them all of these things about God and you can use Ezekiel 37 as a guide for you both. And if you are struggling yourself, or if you're maybe not yet to come to faith at all, then please just listen to all that God wants to do for you. God restore backslider. I'm going to finish by putting up a list of what we will probably classify as amazing believers. Here's a list of people who did amazing things for God. Peter, Mark, Abraham, David, Moses, Samson, Noah, Judah, Jonah, and all of these massive, massive figures in the history of God's redemptive plan. What do they all have in common? They were all backslider in one way or another and yet God restored them all. I can't even begin to say how amazing God is. And by His grace, may we all have our trust in Him. Amen. Let's pray. God our Father, your grace, your mercy, your love, your faithfulness is beyond us. It's beyond what we can understand. It is just astonishing. And oh God, we acknowledge that we are all prone to wonder. We're all tempted by the world. We all have sinful thoughts and desires in our hearts that can lure us.

And we all stumble one way or another. But oh God, how we thank you. That you are so faithful. That you are the one who will never let us die. And so draw us, oh God, by your word speaking to us and by your spirit working in us. That we would look to you and follow you. And that there would never again be a moment in our lives where our eyes are not fixed on Jesus. We pray in His name. Amen.