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## Drifting Away from God

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TEXT: Jeremiah 2:4-6,13 (NIV)

Hear the word of the Lord, you descendants of Jacob, all you clans of Israel. This is what the Lord says: "What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves. They did not ask, 'Where is the Lord, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, a land of drought and utter darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives?'

"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

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There are many lessons about life found in the Old Testament. There's lessons about God and his nature. There's lessons about what he's looking for from us in life and what displeases him when we do certain things. There's lessons about how he wants us to live and things he wants us to avoid. Matter of fact, the whole Old Testament was written in the past, inspired by the Holy Spirit through its many authors, and it was written to teach us, Romans 15:4 says, so that through the endurance we see there, the endurance that's taught there, and the encouragement from the stories recorded for us there, the real life stories that are found there, you and I might have hope in our hearts; and unquenchable optimism because we see the nature of God and the work of God in the world.

And so, when we come to the book of Jeremiah and the prophet Jeremiah comes on the scene, is called by God to speak his word to the nation of Israel, we can take note that God is wanting to show us about himself there – about our lives, and about how our lives work. The nation has been straying or drifting away from God, and many people in the nation are even in active

rebellion against God. And so, God calls forth Jeremiah and begins to speak to them through the mouth of Jeremiah, and he first begins affirming their past. "The Word of the Lord came to me," Jeremiah writes, "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem." God said to him, "This is what the sovereign Lord says. I remember the devotion of your youth how as a bride, you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown." God called these people to himself, and as they were a young nation, they were devoted to God and wanted to follow him. And like a loving bride, they responded to God as their as their husband, as their shepherd, and followed him in the wilderness. And he carried them along through a land that was lifeless. "Israel," he says, "was holy to me," holy to the Lord, set apart by God. They were the first fruits of his harvest. This was the first nation he called to himself. Anyone who rose up against them and tried to devour this nation, this bride of his, they were held guilty. Disaster overtook their enemies. God was showing them what it's like. He was reminding them of what it's like when they gave their allegiance to him, how he cared for them, how he shepherded them, how he loved them, how he watched over them.

This is a common theme in Scripture – that as people give their allegiance to God and they honor him, God honors them back. Jesus said this in Matthew 6, He said to his followers, "You know, if you will seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, you won't have to worry about what you'll eat, what you'll drink, what you'll wear, and all the needs of life. Your Heavenly Father knows that you need them, and he'll bring them to you." The psalmist said it this way. "I was young and now I'm old, yet have never seen the righteous," (those who pursue God first,) "I've never seen those who put their faith in Christ and seek Him first, I've never seen them forsaken. I've never seen their children begging for bread." So, God reminds them of what it's like to live in his good graces, even though they've been drifting away from him. He gives them this this reminder of their past. You know, it doesn't take long for one generation that follows the next to not hear the stories and be taught what's true. And they can drift away from principles and tradition and really what's behind that, the reverence and fear of God.

So that's what had happened here in the nation of Israel. And so now Jeremiah brings a word currently to this nation. He says, "Hear the word of the Lord," starting in verse four, you descendants of Jacob, all you clans of Israel. This is what the Lord says. What fault did your ancestors find in me that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves. They were they were not usable by God. And helping restore the world to a right way. They did not ask, "Where is the Lord who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness?"

They just dismissed this when they ran into trouble. "I brought you into a fertile land," he says,

to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable. The priest did not ask, "Where's the Lord?" Those who deal with the law did not know me. The leaders rebelled against me, the prophets prophesied by a false God. Therefore, I bring these charges against you again. And I bring charges against your children's children.

God was reprimanding them for losing sight of him, losing sight of their history, losing sight of his goodness. And he was telling them that every part of the nation, the priests weren't calling out to him, the lawmakers weren't calling out to him. The leaders were rebelling against him. Even those that were speaking God's word were not staying aligned with God had revealed about Himself. Therefore, He was bringing a judgment against them.

He said to them this: "Cross over to the coast of Cyprus and look, send to Kita and observe closely, see if there has ever been anything like this." What was happening in their lives that he wanted them to observe. He said, "Has a nation ever changed its gods? My people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols. Be appalled at this, you heavens and shudder with great horror," declared the Lord. And then we get to this point where Jeremiah was instructed by God to say these words in Jeremiah 2:13, where he said, "My people have committed two sins, two evils. They have forsaken me," God says, "the spring or the fountain of living water, and they have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns, that cannot hold water."

They're drifting away. They're moving away from the Lord. The picture here is such a poignant picture. There's a fountain of life spewing forth, springs of living water flowing out of this fountain. And people have become disillusioned by this fountain. They pick up shovels and they move away from the fountain to find other water somewhere else, water that's buried in the ground. And they start to dig and dig, looking for satisfaction away from the spring of living waters. And the farther they dig, they may find a little water, but the cisterns don't hold water. They don't bring that life-giving nourishment to them. They've forsaken me the spring of living water and dug their own cisterns. Broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

It's an image of what's happening to people as they drift away from God. They're moving more and more towards dissatisfaction. Striving, searching, and seeking, but never finding. The prophet Haggai described something like this when he was also sent by God to correct some drifting people. He said, "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat but never have enough. You drink but never have your fill. You

put on clothes but are not warm. You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it." Maybe you've heard the statement "The only thing that's insane is doing things over and over the same way, expecting different results." As people drift farther away from God, looking for life outside of him, they get more and more empty and dissatisfied. Jeremiah said this "You have brought this on yourselves by forsaking the Lord your God, your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord, your God, and have no awe of Him."

God is clearly showing us in this text that there's no real, lasting joy, there's no real fullness of life, there's no real human flourishing, there's no real satisfaction in life without him. There may be fleeting pleasure that does not last as we look to satisfy our own souls by digging broken cisterns anywhere we think we might find some fulfillment. But that satisfaction, that that pleasure, that fleeting pleasure, grows more and more empty and more and more unsatisfying, because God has placed in human beings a God-shaped vacuum deep in their spirits, in their souls. Certainly we have a body, we have a soul. But deep within us is the spirit that's designed to be filled and inhabited by God Himself. And from there we're to have this illuminating power of His, His Holy Spirit within us so that we can in him live and move and have our being. A glass is made to be filled with liquid. A car is made to be filled and fueled with gasoline. And you and I were made to be filled and fueled by the very presence of God Himself. And so, satisfaction only comes to you and I when we're doing life with God and doing it empowered by him in his way.

The Psalmist said, "It is the Lord who satisfies the longing soul. It is He who fills the hungry with good things." Psalm 107:9. Jesus said it this way: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never grow hungry. And whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." King Solomon went all around the world digging broken cisterns, looking for what might bring him satisfaction in life, what might bring him fulfillment. And you can read all about it in Ecclesiastes, his book that he penned for us there, Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, he said,

A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their toil. This, too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without Him who can eat or find enjoyment. To the person who pleases Him, God gives wisdom and knowledge and happiness. But to the sinner, he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to one who pleases God."

Clearly, we see in this passage of Scripture that as people drift away from God, they become less and less satisfied, less and less fulfilled in life. In their dissatisfaction, Jeremiah says, they

will run until their feet are bare, until their throat is dry. They'll pursue these foreign gods and say to themselves, they must go after them. Part of what it means to be alive is to pursue those desires, those longings that exist in our hearts and our souls. And to pursue those means we take action. We move in a direction where we think we'll find fulfillment. If a person is deprived of oxygen, they'll do what they can to find breathing room to get oxygen into their lungs. If a person is hungry and their stomach is growling, they'll start to pursue and look for food. And if a person feels devoid of meaning and purpose and fullness and satisfaction in life, they'll start looking for where they can find this. It's just wired into us to be pursuing that which will meet our needs, which will bring fulfillment to us. And because of our sinful nature, we will often move in ways that God has not designed us to move, to find satisfaction and fulfillment in life. And that's why God has sent His Word to us and His Holy Spirit to keep drawing us back to himself and calling us to him; teaching us about the deceptiveness of our heart and how we can be deceived and confused and tricked into pursuing things that ultimately will enslave us and not fulfill us. And so, God has sent prophets down through the ages and His Word to us now. And we continue to open his word and listen as God continues to call us back to Himself, where at his right hand, there is the fullness of joy and pleasures more. God himself is calling to people and to nations. "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Believe in me and out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water." God is the source of life, the genesis of all things. He is the one that our whole lives should revolve around.

Perhaps, as you're listening to this today, you have a sense of needing more fullness in your life, needing more purpose, more inspiration, more drive. Can I encourage you today to take some time to reflect on where you've been looking for that fullness and that meaning and that purpose, that inspiration? And if it hasn't been God, can I encourage you to reorient yourselves and take some time to consider how you could draw closer to him and find strength and purpose and power and fullness from him? For it is in him we live and move and have our being.

Let's pray together, Heavenly Father, as we consider your word and we think about what you've taught us about life and about fullness and about purpose and meaning and inspiration. We know all of these come from your hand. And so we ask today for forgiveness from straying away from you. We ask for forgiveness for us as individuals, for pursuing other things that you have said should not be before you. And we ask for forgiveness as a people, as a nation, that you would forgive us for straying away from you and trying to dig broken cisterns that can hold no water. In your mercy and your kindness, draw us back to yourself to

find our great hope, our great passion, our great life, and even the blessing that comes from your hand in you. Thank you, Father, for your patience and your kindness. Please work this in our hearts and in our communities and in our nations. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.