

## ***How to Get Going Again When You're Spiritually Stuck – Psalm 51:12***

It's a snowy day. You are in a hurry. You're on your way to an important destination. You hit the brakes. You skid unexpectedly and slide into a ditch. You think, "If I hit the accelerator, I can get out quickly." You get in deeper. You're stuck – really stuck. It's a lousy feeling, a huge inconvenience. It's potentially life threatening.

Getting stuck happens with more than cars. Marriages get stuck. Careers get stuck. Businesses get stuck. But it is most significant of all when we get spiritually stuck in our relationship with God. It has been my experience. It's probably been your experience, too. If it has never happened, the chances are good that it will happen.

What are some of the symptoms? I suppose high up on the list is coming to that day when we say, "It used to be better than this. There was a time when I had vibrancy in my relationship with Jesus Christ. I had a love for God. I was really excited about God and everything that had to do with him. But, it's just not like that anymore. It's not the same."

Or, another symptom is when something or someone else has become more important than God. He used to be at the top of the list but he's slipped to second or tenth or thirty-fifth place. It can be a college degree, a high school diploma. It can be amassing a fortune. It can be a new car, a new house or a new friendship. It can be just about anything except God.

For some people, getting spiritually stuck has to do with being frustrated with God. You feel God has let you down. You are disappointed, maybe even angry with God.

Maybe it's that the vital signs are weak. Prayer. Bible study. Worship. Financial giving. Service to others. Church involvement.

When a physician checks a patient's pulse, blood pressure or breathing, no single sign proves or disproves over-all health. But multiple weak vital signs usually mean something is seriously wrong. Likewise, the person who prays little, serves no one, gives little or nothing, ignores the Bible, doesn't worship and skips church is most likely spiritually stagnant.

Nothing separates us from God or gets us stuck faster and deeper than sin. Sin is either doing what we shouldn't do or not doing what we should do.

One of the prime evidences of being spiritually stuck is apathy. I really don't care if I'm spiritually stuck. I'm content the way things are. I just don't have much desire for God.

I've been spiritually stuck, lots of times... too many times. The question is, how do I get going again? What do I do?

Powerful and practical advice comes from Israel's King David in Psalm 51. David knew he was stuck. Once he had been so close to God that God called him a special friend, but adultery and murder tumbled David from spiritual heights to spiritual depths. In fact, he was in a pit so deep that he knew he could never pull himself out. It was then that he asked God for help.

In Psalm 51:10 David wrote, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." And in verse 12 he pleads, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me."

David knew he was stuck in a pit and he really, really wanted to get out, so he not only prayed to be spiritually renewed but he prayed that God would make him willing to be renewed.

When we are spiritually stuck we need to

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ask God for help, for renewal. It may take a lot of asking. God may want to know if we're serious. Those who have been spiritually stuck for a long time should not ordinarily expect instant renewal of a relationship with God. Ask God for renewal every day for a month. Write out your prayer. Set aside an hour for special prayer, maybe even a whole day.

I have known men whose relationships with their wives have deteriorated or stagnated for years. Once passionate love has cooled. Once "best friends" have grown far apart, maybe even become enemies. Then there is that awful/wonderful day of realization. Often the wake-up call is wrapped in divorce papers or a cancer diagnosis or a business failure, and somehow it is as if eyes are opened. He says to his wife, "I'm so sorry. Let's make our marriage good again." He asks her and asks her and even begs her, only to discover to his dismay that she may not believe what he has to say.

God deserves nothing less. "Restore to me the joy of your salvation," David pleaded. It's a good prayer for anyone who is spiritually stuck.

During a six-week sabbatical I visited churches from rural Minnesota to urban Saigon. United Methodist, Southern Baptist, Pentecostal, Independent. One of those churches was in Florida where a spiritual awakening brought 1.5 million people from across America and around the world. We had to get in line at 3 p.m. for a seat at a 7 p.m. service. The temperature was in the low 40's. A thousand people stood in the rain to wait . . . people from Australia to Finland. Perhaps what impressed me most was what people will do to experience God. It's surprising what people will put up with to come and to ask God for renewal.

There is other advice from David for those who are spiritually stuck and want to get going again. It is to take responsibility. That was difficult for David to do. By this time he was a king and he was reluctant to admit that what he had done was wrong. But he had to come to the place where he would acknowledge that it

was not God who had distanced himself from David; rather, it was David who had distanced himself from God. After all, God is not the one who moves away. God is not the one who sins. And, in the same way, the responsibility is ours.

I find that when I have crowded God out of my life, I can come up with a lot of excuses. I'll tell you my favorite. Busyness. It isn't that I don't love God or desire for him to have first priority in my life. It's just that my schedule is full; my life is busy; I get tired. But, who is responsible for my busyness? It is not somebody else. I am the one who makes my schedule. I am the one who is responsible, and I am the one who has failed in meeting the responsibility of putting God first in life.

David admitted in Psalm 51:3-4, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."

It is true that our lives are buffeted by thousands of uncontrollable circumstances, but we can be responsible for our response to those circumstances. We can take responsibility for our sin and for our mistakes. We can take responsibility for our relationship with God.

It is powerfully transforming to quit blaming and take responsibility. When we take responsibility, here's what happens according to I John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." God will forgive our sins. He will cleanse us. God delights in people saying, "I'm wrong. I'll take responsibility for what I have said and done." God rewards responsibility. He is the one who gets us out of the rut.

A third piece of advice on how to get going again when spiritually stuck is demonstrated in David's life, although he never quite said it. It is to seek God in difficulty.

Do you ever think about how much better everything will be as soon as you get past current problems? I do! I think I'll pray more and read the Bible and give money and get my whole life in order as soon as the current project

is completed, the pressures let up, the bills are paid, the corner is turned. It's almost as if spiritual renewal and vitality are greatest only in good times. Actually, the opposite is usually true.

David's life was not easy. When he was a boy his older brothers went off to war and David was left behind to shepherd the family sheep alone. It was his responsibility to protect the animals against wild animals and other threats.

When he was a youth, David stood alone against a Philistine giant named Goliath. The destiny of the nation was on him. When he became a man he led a rebel army against King Saul, was called a traitor by his mentor, lost his best friend in battle and unified a disjointed nation while constantly under attack.

Through all these difficulties David remained faithful to God, enjoyed an intimate relationship with the Lord, prayed often, experienced miracles and wrote most of the Old Testament Psalms.

Then his difficulties diminished. The capital was established in Jerusalem. The nation was united. Others fought his enemies while David stayed at home. Prosperity arrived. The pressure was off. His problems were solved.

Did David soar spiritually? Hardly! He lusted for his neighbor. He committed adultery. He lied to his best friends. He ordered one of his most loyal followers executed. He sank to the lowest point of his life spiritually, politically and personally.

The principle is obvious. When times are tough, we need God. When times are good, we think we can manage life on our own. So, if you're spiritually stuck and difficulties are many, seek God in difficulty. Don't wait for everything to improve. Life's hard times are when we are most spiritually responsive. If we wait for everything to be perfect, we'll never

get out of our spiritual rut and never fully experience God!

The fourth and final piece of advice for the spiritually stuck is to go where God is blessing. This principle comes from Jesus in Matthew 6:33. It is there that Jesus said, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

In other words, stop asking God to bless your plans and join up with God's plans. That is kind of backwards to the way we are most likely to operate. What we tend to do is make plans or get into a relationship or a business deal and then say, "God, make it succeed." Instead of asking divine endorsement for what we choose to do, we should seek out what God is doing and where he is and then join up with what God is about and everything else will follow. This is a principle that has been greatly popularized by Canadian author Henry Blackaby in the popular Bible study *Experiencing God*.

California pastor Rick Warren talks about surfers "riding the wave." Surfers don't take their boards to a calm bay and pray for a wave.

They go where the waves are breaking and ride them in.

That is a spiritual principle as well. Look for where God is blessing and join the Bible study, share the prayer meeting, partici-

pate in the worship, get in on the evangelism, give your financial support.

The most practical application of this principle is in the people we spend our time with. Do your friends spiritually renew you or drain you? Do you seek out people whose lives are powerfully connected to God? Do you spend time around people who love God, know God and experience God? If not, seek them out. Even if it takes weeks or months – go where

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they are, learn from them, copy what they do, catch the spirituality.

I heard an interesting practical measurement of a person's relationship with God. It has to do with airplanes and I've been on a lot of airplanes recently, so maybe I took this more personally than most people would. Imagine yourself on a commercial airliner. You are flying along and something really bad happens. The plane is obviously going to crash. You have 30 seconds to live. What would you more likely do: repent or worship? Would you plead with God for mercy and forgiveness or would you worship the God you are ready to meet face-to-face?

Don't wait for the calamity! If you are far from God and spiritually stuck, ask God to unstuck you, to spiritually renew you today. Don't wait for the last 30 seconds!

I want to specially pray for everyone who wants spiritual renewal. Is that you? If so, this prayer is for you:

Lord God, I pray now for each person who acknowledges being spiritually stuck and who really wants renewal. I ask that you will hear their prayers asking for renewal. Show each of us the sin in our lives and teach us repentance and responsibility. I pray that for each one you will come close in difficulty. Draw each one to where you are blessing. May your Holy Spirit seize our souls and fill our lives. Rekindle our passion for Jesus Christ. Bring us close to you, our God - no matter what it takes!

I ask all this in the wonderful and powerful name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church  
6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
952-944-6300  
[www.wooddale.org](http://www.wooddale.org)  
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