

Have You Wandered out From Under the Canopy of God's Favor?

An ounce of prevention is said to be worth a pound of cure. Never was it truer than when God levied the tenth and final plague against Egypt—a death angel sent to claim the firstborn child of every household. To shield the Israelites from this threat, God instructed each family to slay a lamb and apply its blood to the door posts of their houses. This event spawned the annual Passover Feast that is still celebrated some 3,500 years later. God's promise, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you," hinged on one crucial condition, "None of you shall go out from the door of his house until the morning" (Ex. 12:13b, 22b).

The message was clear—"stay under the protection of the blood." If a Jew ventured outside his house that fateful night, he would have put himself in danger. As long as they remained in their houses, they had the guarantee of divine protection from the plague. The next morning, weeping and wailing rudely awakened Egypt from its slumber as parents discovered lifeless children, "For there was not a house where there was not one dead" (Ex. 12:30.) Among the Israelites, not one soul was lost. Why? They stayed in the house!

Forty years later, Joshua sent two spies to scout out Jericho. There they met Rahab the harlot, whose house provided direct access to and from the city. She cleverly hid the spies under stalks of flax on her roof and misled the king's soldiers on a wild goose chase. Rahab told the spies that the citizens of Jericho heard how God parted the Red Sea and drowned the Egyptian army. The inhabitants of Jericho nervously suspected that they were next on God's hit list.

Rahab only asked that they return her favor with a favor—that her family be spared. The spies agreed, provided she displayed the scarlet rope she used to let them out of the city in her window. They warned her that their vow would be nullified “If anyone goes outside your house into the street” (Josh. 2:19, NIV). When God reduced the massive walls of Jericho to rubble, only one section remained intact—Rahab’s house with her family huddled safely inside. Again, they stayed in the house.

As a pastor, I’ve seen many people take foolish risks by quitting church over trivial issues. Sadly, as a result, their lives or families often end up falling apart. The truth is, we need each other. Too many dangers lurk outside the safety of the fold. Satan’s goal is to isolate us and then exploit our vulnerability. A lone sheep has a far less chance against a wolf than a united flock with a watchful shepherd. Solomon wisely wrote, “Two are better than one . . . for if they fall, then one will help up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has no one to help him up” (Eccl. 4:9-10, MEV).

It would have been presumptuous for Noah’s family to wander outside the ark as the rain began to fall, thinking they could swim back when the water rose too high. Unfortunately, many people gamble with their soul this way. They get discouraged or disgruntled and leave the church, opening the door for Satan to wreak havoc in their lives and then wonder why God let them down. Friend, please stay in the ark of safety. Stay under the canopy of protection and favor that results from fellowship with God and other believers.

The prodigal son in Jesus’ famous parable was seduced by the “the grass is greener on the other side” illusion. He demanded his inheritance and swiftly squandered it. As soon as his money was gone, so too were his fair-weather friends. This young man, who just wanted to have fun away from the rigid rules of his father’s house, learned the hard lesson that sin takes you farther than you want to stray, costs you more than

you want to pay and keeps you longer than you want to stay!

Admittedly, there is fun in sin, or no one would commit it. But eventually the fun (what lures people out of the house to begin with) wears off, and the consequences start taking their toll. Every lure has hidden hooks. Caution: In regard to temptation, the grass is always the greenest near the septic tank!

After living high on the hog, the bankrupt prodigal ended up feeding hogs—the ultimate insult for a Jew. Satan promises the palace but delivers the pigpen. Starved, even the swine feed looked appetizing to the prodigal. Finally, when he hit rock bottom, he came to his senses, realized what a fool he'd been and worked up the courage to return home. He expected to be treated like a slave. Instead, his father saw him in the distance, ran to meet him, kissed and embraced him and threw a feast fit for a king. He ordered the servants to bring out the best robe (symbolic of righteousness), a ring (a token of union and authority) and shoes (a badge of sonship and freedom), three items he had probably pawned for a few meals. The prodigal was restored all to the rights and privileges of sonship.

Late that first night back in his father's house, after the celebration subsided, I can see this wayward son lying down in his old bedroom. The familiar surroundings evoked a flurry of fond memories. Staring at the ceiling, in retrospect, he must have thought, *If only I had stayed in my father's house.* Restored? Yes! Forgiven? Absolutely! A new beginning? Definitely! But oh, the ugly scars, the wasted years and resources, the haunting memories, the nagging regrets of falling out of fellowship with his father.

Restoration is one of God's specialties, but prevention is His preference. It's good to have an airbag in your car, but better not to need one. And while God's grace is a safety net that will catch us if we fall, His grace, better yet, is able

to keep us from falling (Jude 24). And while it is no secret what God can do, it is also no secret what we should do—stay in the house! {eoa}

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