

# Signs of a Heart That's Far From God

The prodigal son didn't end up among the pigs the day he left his father's house; he went through a gradual process of decline (see Luke 15:11-15). So it is with us. If the enemy presented the end with the first temptation, it would be easy to resist! But usually the departure from grace is so subtle that even leaders take the bait.

The warning signs are visible long before we fully embrace sin. One of the first is that we allow other people or things to take the place in our hearts that belongs only to God.

Preferring any earthly thing over God is a clear sign that our hearts have wandered. Even the spiritually mature are in danger of allowing what is visible to usurp the place of the eternal, invisible God.

The result is that we become lukewarm in our pursuit of God. Complacency sets in. We compare ourselves to the standard of others rather than to the standard of the Word and justify what we know is compromise.

We begin to live "a form of godliness," being outwardly religious but having no power in our lives (2 Tim. 3:5, KJV). Self then takes the throne (see vv. 2-4). We are no longer able to express the pure love God desires and are often judgmental and critical of others. Ultimately, like the prodigal son squandering his inheritance, we end up on the path to sin and spiritual death.

If your heart has wandered, recognizing your condition and crying out for God's help is the first step back into His empowering grace. Even your failure can be a stepping stone to a higher place spiritually if you come to see that your flesh can't be trusted. Understanding your own weakness is a key to

releasing God's power on your behalf.

The next step is to get right with God and others. Even if you have been wronged, you must forgive. This may seem difficult, but it is essential to maintaining communication with God—and it is worth the price. As one saint wrote: "When the soul seeks nothing in the universe but the smile of God and fears nothing but offending Him, it will gladly consent to pay any price to get perfectly right with Him."

Third, look to God and His Word as your standard rather than to those around you. Jesus said, "'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'" (Matt. 5:48). This is an impossible standard for us to attain on our own, but with God we can do all things (see Phil. 4:13).

Finally, learn to walk in the Spirit, keeping your mind on God and His kingdom by praying continually. In this manner the Holy Spirit will become a filter for your thoughts. Daily pray Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (NIV). God will be faithful to answer this prayer and to keep your heart stayed on Him. \*