
A BRUISED REED AND A SMOKING FLAX

*Real Security, Sober Warning, and
the Mercy of a Loving God*

*“A bruised reed He will not break, and
smoking flax He will not quench...”*

— ISAIAH 42:3



OLUDARE AKINBO

“A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench...”

— ISAIAH 42:3 NKJV

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”

— JOHN 15:5–6 NKJV

A Word Before the Word

Few questions have caused more confusion, more anxiety, and more quiet pride in the modern church than this one: Once saved, always saved? Believers who love the same Bible have divided over it, congregations have split over it, and countless sincere Christians have gone to bed at night unsure whether the answer determines their salvation.

The confusion is not because Scripture is unclear. The confusion is because Scripture seemingly teaches two things at once, and the modern instinct is to latch on to the one that resonates with our inner leanings and subconsciously ignore or downplay the other. On one side sit the promises of unshakeable security in Christ, spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. On the other sit the warnings of falling away, of being cut off, of the dog returning to its vomit, spoken by the very same Jesus Christ and by His apostles. Both sets of verses are inspired. Both were meant to be read. Neither is a printing error.

Yet Scripture itself never truly contradicts. When all its verses are taken as a whole, it speaks with a uniform voice — a clear, obvious harmony that reveals the wisdom of the God who inspired it. What sometimes appears at first as a contradiction is almost always Scripture teaching us to hold two truths together in mature discernment, applying each to its proper context.

Consider Proverbs 26, verses 4 and 5, sitting side by side in the very same chapter:

“

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

— Proverbs 26:4–5 NKJV

Read quickly, these two verses look like a direct contradiction. Do not answer. Answer. Which is it? But the moment we sit with them, their wisdom emerges. Solomon is not confused. He is teaching a mature discernment — the ability to know which response the moment calls for. There are times when engaging a fool on his own terms would drag us down to his level; in those moments, silence is the right answer. And there are other times when leaving his folly unchallenged would let him walk away convinced he is wise; in those moments, answering him — carefully, on the level his folly demands — is the right response. Both verses are true. Both are needed. The believer who takes only one and ignores the other will act rashly in one direction or the other.

The apparent tension between once saved, always saved (security) and intentionally living right (responsibility) in the New Testament works the same way, on a far larger canvas. Both the promises of unshakable grip by God (irrevocable salvation) and the warnings of falling away are true. Both were meant to be read. Both were meant to shape a mature discernment about what the walk with our Lord Jesus Christ actually is. The reader who takes only one and dismisses the other will misrepresent Scripture's witness on the salvation of the believer.

What follows is not an attempt to resolve the tension by taking sides. It is an attempt to walk into the paired truths honestly, let both sides speak, and see if Scripture itself gives us the picture that holds them together. I believe it does — and the picture is the vine.

Before we begin, two things must be said clearly.

This is not a book about earning salvation. The demand-formula that says God must respond because we have done enough is the misunderstanding and erroneous belief we explored and addressed fully in the book *Yet Will I Trust Him* (available at oludareakinbo.com). The opposite error — that we must earn our continued standing before God by keeping enough rules — is just as damaging and just as unbiblical. Continuance in Christ is the fruit of an abiding relationship, not currency paid to keep God's favour. Paul's language of patient continuance in doing good (Romans 2:7) is not a sliding scale of merit. It is the natural evidence of a life still connected to the vine.

This is not a book about anxious performance. The Christian who reads the harder verses of this book and immediately begins to fear that a single stumble has cost them their salvation has misread the whole vine. That fear is not the fruit of this teaching. It is a misuse of it. Scripture that warns of falling away is written for the branch that has quietly, deliberately let go — not the one still, however imperfectly, holding on.

With those two things named at the start, we can begin.

The Grafted Branch

If you grew up anywhere near a Nigerian farm — or even just had an uncle who took gardening a little too seriously — you have probably seen grafting done at least once. A farmer takes a strong, hardy rootstock, usually something local and stubborn, and cuts a small slit into it. Then he takes a tender shoot from a better variety — sweeter mango, better citrus — and binds it into that slit until, over weeks, the two become one. Sap begins to flow from root to branch. The graft takes. And soon that branch is producing fruit it could never have produced on its own.

But — and here is the part every farmer knows and some students of the Bible sometimes forget — a graft that takes is not automatically permanent. If the branch is damaged, if it is deliberately cut away, or if something blocks the flow of sap for long enough, it withers. Not because the rootstock changed its mind. Because the connection was broken.

But — and this is the other part every good farmer also knows — no wise grafter stands over a damaged branch with the shears at the ready. If part of a grafted branch is dying yet any part of it still lives, if the sap is still flowing anywhere along its length, the farmer leaves it alone. He waters the tree. He gives it time. He lets the dead sections gradually heal, calluses form over the wounds, new green push out from the living wood. A branch that still shows any sign of life is a branch worth waiting for. That patience is not weakness. It is the wisdom of a man who knows what a graft can recover from, and what it cannot.

This is exactly the picture the prophet Isaiah drew of the coming Messiah, seven centuries before He arrived:

“ A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench...

— Isaiah 42:3 NKJV

Matthew quotes that very verse in application to Christ (Matthew 12:20). A bruised reed still stands, however weakly; He does not break it. Smoking flax — the wick of an oil lamp barely giving off a thread of smoke, its flame nearly gone — is still, in some small measure, alive; He does not quench it. He does not throw away the weak. He does not discard the barely-alive. He waits with the patience of a farmer over a damaged branch that has not yet, despite everything, lost its connection to the sap.

But even that patience has an honest limit, and Jesus Christ Himself named it. In the same John 15 discourse in which He calls us to abide in Him as branches in the vine, He said this:

“ Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

— John 15:2 NKJV

The bruised reed is not broken. The smoking flax is not quenched. But the branch that has finally, completely stopped bearing any fruit — the branch that has stopped

drawing sap altogether, that has severed itself entirely from the vine — that branch, at last, is taken away. Not because the vinedresser is impatient. Because there is nothing left for Him to preserve.

Our Lord Jesus Christ used almost this exact picture. He did not compare our life in Him to a permanent tattoo, to a signed contract filed away, or to a decision that carries itself through the rest of a person's life without any further engagement. He compared it to a branch. A branch draws life continuously. A branch has to remain — or to use the word Jesus used repeatedly in John 15, to abide. The Greek word behind that verb is *menō* (μένω), and it carries a sense that our English translations sometimes soften: a continuous, unbroken presence; an active, ongoing dependence; a persistent dwelling that does not leave. It is the word Scripture uses elsewhere for a guest who stays overnight rather than passing through, for a house that stands firm rather than collapsing, for anything that continues rather than departing. Jesus did not pick this word by accident. He picked it because a branch that stops remaining, abiding, stops being a branch. A branch that is severed does not stop being a branch by accident — it stops drawing sap, and the leaves follow.

That single image carries the whole tension people wrestle with when they ask: once saved, always saved — is that really how it works?

Two Verses People Love to Quote

(and Usually Half-Quote)

Believers on the eternal-security side love this one, and rightly so:

“ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

— John 10:27–28 NKJV

That is a real promise. No devil, no accusation, no external enemy can snatch a yielded believer out of God's hand. Full stop. Anyone who tells you God's grip is weak, or that some outside force can wrestle you away from Him, has not read this verse carefully. The Lord's hand is not a slippery place. Once He has taken hold of a sheep, no wolf is stronger than that grip.

But notice what the verse does not say. It does not say that the sheep can wander off, stop hearing the Shepherd's voice, stop following Him entirely, build a new life in open rebellion against Him, and still somehow remain “in His hand” by default. The promise is for sheep who hear and follow — present tense, ongoing. It is a description of a living relationship, not a certificate laminated the day you got saved and filed away forever, untouched by anything that happens afterward. The Shepherd's grip is unbreakable from

without. Scripture never says it is unbreakable from within.

And on the other side of the same Bible sit the verses that make the pure “once saved, always saved” position genuinely uncomfortable to hold without qualification. The writer of Hebrews wrote them, and the Spirit inspired them, and no one who wants to be faithful to Scripture can quietly step around them:

“ For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance...

— Hebrews 6:4–6 NKJV

The same writer returns to the theme a few chapters later, with even sharper language:

“ For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries... Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

— Hebrews 10:26–29 NKJV

And Peter adds a picture that is uncomfortably vivid but honest:

“ For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’

— 2 Peter 2:21–22 NKJV

I will not pretend that is a comfortable verse to read aloud in a church service. But Scripture did not include it for our comfort. It included it as a warning light on the dashboard — the kind you should not disable just because the sound is unpleasant.

So which is it? The unbreakable grip, or the branch that can be cut off? The eternal life given freely, or the fearful expectation of judgement for the one who tramples the blood?

Here is where I will be direct with you, because gentle does not mean vague. Scripture teaches both real security and real responsibility, and the tension between them is not a contradiction to be resolved by picking a side — it is a relationship to be lived inside of.

Paul makes this plain in Romans, using this exact grafting picture:

“

Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear... Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

— **Romans 11:20, 22 NKJV**

“If you continue.” That is not a threat designed to make anyone anxious every waking hour. It is an honest description of how the vine works. God is not fickle, changing His mind about believers on a whim like an unpredictable relative during rainy season. He does not go looking for reasons to cut branches off. But a branch that decisively stops drawing from the vine — through prolonged, unrepentant, wilful rejection of Him, not a single (or even multiple) stumble in moments of foolishness or weakness — has done the severing itself, long before the vinedresser ever touches the shears.

The Justice of God and the

Question of the Unrepentant

Before we look at the men and women Scripture names as examples, we should ask an honest question. It is a question that pulls the whole discussion into clearer focus.

Would it show the justice and goodness of God for the wilfully unrepentant to enter His Kingdom simply because they were once redeemed?

Take a moment with that. Picture a man who once walked with God — who confessed Christ, who received the Spirit, who worshipped, who served — and who then, over the course of years, deliberately walked away. Not stumbled. Walked. He rejected the Lord's authority, mocked His word, embraced open evil, dragged others into it with him, and died in that state without ever turning back. If eternal life were an unconditional guarantee handed out at the point of first belief and honoured regardless of what a person does with the rest of their life, this man would still enter the Kingdom. He would walk into the new heaven and new earth alongside the martyr who was burned for refusing to deny his Lord, alongside the widow who kept praying through forty years of hardship, alongside the man whose only prayer in his last hour was for mercy.

Would that be justice? Would that be goodness? Would it honour the blood of the martyrs, the sighs of the persecuted, the perseverance of the faithful? Would it honour the very holiness Scripture ascribes to God Himself?

The prophet Habakkuk gives us the answer as directly as Scripture ever gives it:

“ You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness.

— Habakkuk 1:13 NKJV

And the last book of Scripture describes the new Jerusalem in language just as final:

“ But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

— Revelation 21:27 NKJV

Scripture does not describe a Kingdom into which the unrepentant, having once been redeemed, are quietly ushered on the grounds of a decision made decades earlier. It describes a Kingdom into which only those written in the Lamb's Book of Life enter — and it warns, in the same book, that names can be blotted out:

“ He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

— Revelation 3:5 NKJV

I will not blot out his name. The promise is meaningful precisely because the possibility is real. If names could never be blotted out under any circumstance, the promise would be empty. It would be like promising a swimmer that you will not throw them out of a swimming pool they cannot possibly leave. The very structure of the promise assumes the possibility of the alternative.

The prophet Ezekiel makes the same point in the plainest terms of the Old Testament:

“ But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.

— Ezekiel 18:24 NKJV

There is no way to read this verse and still hold the pure once-saved-always-saved position without qualification. The Spirit through Ezekiel is not describing a hypothetical that never happens. He is describing a real category of person: the once-righteous who turns from their righteousness. And He says, without softening the language, he shall die.

This is not because God has changed. God does not blot out names in a fit of rage, and He does not consign the merely-stumbling to death. He is patient. He is longsuffering. He is, as Peter says, “not willing that any should perish, but

that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). But His patience is not the same as pretending the connection does not matter. And His mercy is not the same as bringing the wilfully unrepentant into a Kingdom His holiness cannot share space with.

The justice of God requires that the door of the Kingdom be open, wide open, to every returning prodigal — and closed, finally closed, against the wilful rejecter who walked away with eyes open and never turned back. That door is not closed by God's severity. It is closed by the unrepentant one's own choice, sustained over a lifetime, never withdrawn.

That is not the harshness of God. That is the honesty of God. A Kingdom that let the unrepentant in would not be a Kingdom worth calling holy.

Six Who Walked Away

Scripture is not silent about those who once knew the Lord and consciously turned from Him. It names them. It records their stories. It does not soften what they became.

What follows are six of them — kings, disciples, co-workers, teachers — from across both Testaments. Each began with a real relationship to the God of Israel or to the Lord Jesus Christ. Each ended somewhere entirely different. In each case, the departure was not a stumble. It was a walking-away, sometimes over years, sometimes in a single moment of settled decision. In each case Scripture describes the departure without flinching and without pretending it was something other than what it was.

A Word Before You Read These Six

Before we meet them, we must set our hearts in the right posture. It is not our place to judge or condemn any man's final standing with God. That judgement belongs to the Lord God alone, who alone sees the heart, who alone knows what a man may have said in his final hours, who alone reads the thoughts that never became words. To pronounce eternal verdicts on men whose full stories God has kept largely to Himself is a presumption we are not licensed for.

Then why do we look at them at all? Because Scripture itself tells us why:

“ Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

— 1 Corinthians 10:11 NKJV

For our admonition. These stories were preserved in the sacred record so that we might study them, learn from them, and be warned by the shape of what happened in each of these men's lives. They are mirrors we are meant to look into, not verdicts we are meant to pronounce.

There is much that Scripture tells us about each of these six, and there is much that Scripture does not tell us. What Scripture does record — clearly, undeniably, and in language we are not free to soften — is that each of them, at some point in his story, walked with God in a real relationship; and each of them, at some later point, made deliberate choices that broke that connection. The Spirit departed from Saul. Solomon built high places for foreign gods. Joash murdered the son of his rescuer in the temple court. Judas negotiated the betrayal at a table. Demas loved this present world and left. Hymenaeus suffered shipwreck concerning the faith. These are the things Scripture writes down without softening.

What Scripture does not always tell us is what may have happened in the private hours of a man's final years — whether he came back to his senses, whether he prayed a broken prayer no one else heard, whether the mercy of God found him at the very last as it found the thief on the cross.

In most cases, we simply are not told. That silence is a mercy toward us, keeping us from the arrogance of pronouncing on eternal destinies that were never given to us to decide.

But there is much that we can say, boldly and without apology. We can say that the pattern Scripture records for these men — the anointing taken away, the Spirit departed, the standing with God cut off by their own choices, the withering and falling away that followed — is written to warn us in the plainest possible terms. And we can say, on the authority of Scripture itself, that if a man who was once redeemed does not turn back to God before his death, he will not enter the Kingdom the vinedresser is preparing:

“ *But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.*

— **Revelation 21:27 NKJV**

That is not our verdict. That is Scripture's verdict, and Scripture applies it universally: to the unrepentant of any generation, regardless of how they began. What follows in these six brief studies is not condemnation. It is a sober look at how good men, real anointings, and genuine callings can, in each case, be forfeited by a chosen direction of life. May the Spirit use them not to make us proud of standing safely on the sidelines while judging others, but to make us humble enough to guard our own connection to the vine.

Read them slowly.

PERSON BOX

Saul, the Anointed King Who Hardened Himself

Saul was chosen by God from among the tribes of Israel — a young man from the smallest family in the smallest tribe, on whom the Spirit of God came so powerfully that he began to prophesy with the prophets. He was anointed by Samuel. He was crowned before the people. He led Israel to victories that other men had feared to attempt. This was not a pretender. This was a man on whom the Spirit had genuinely rested.

And this same man, over the course of a reign that began in humility, hardened himself through repeated wilful disobedience. He was told to wait for Samuel to offer sacrifice; he grew impatient and offered it himself. He was told to destroy the Amalekites completely; he spared the king and the best of the livestock, and then lied about it to the prophet's face. He grew jealous of David, threw spears at him, hunted him across the wilderness, killed the priests of Nob who had unknowingly helped David, and ended his life consulting a medium — the very practice he had earlier banished from the land because the Law of God forbade it.

“But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him” (1 Samuel 16:14).

The Spirit that had come upon him departed. Not because God is fickle. Because Saul had, over years, closed himself to the God who anointed him. His story is one of the clearest warnings in the Old Testament: the anointing is real, but the anointed one can still walk away, and Scripture does not pretend otherwise.

PERSON BOX

Solomon, the Wisest Man Whose Heart Was Turned

Solomon was granted the greatest gift ever offered to a mortal king. Standing in Gibeon, when God appeared to him and told him to ask for whatever he wanted, Solomon asked for an understanding heart to judge the Lord's people. God gave him wisdom greater than any who had come before him or who would come after, and gave him riches and honour besides. Kings and queens travelled across deserts to sit at his feet.

And this same man — who had built the temple, who had prayed the great dedicatory prayer, who had personally seen the glory of the Lord fill the house — allowed his heart to be turned in his old age by his many foreign wives. He built high places for Chemosh, for Molech, for Ashtoreth. The man who had prayed “May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers” ended his reign burning incense to the gods of Sidon.

“Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you” (1 Kings 11:11).

Solomon did not lose his wisdom by a single lapse in judgement. He lost it by a slow, deliberate accommodation of what God had explicitly forbidden. His story warns us that no gift, no anointing, no early faithfulness makes a believer immune from a departure of the heart in old age. Guard the heart to the very end. Apparently, it seems Solomon did not.

PERSON BOX

Joash, the Boy King Who Murdered His Rescuer's Son

Joash's story is one of the most painful in all of Scripture, because it is the story of a man who genuinely walked with God for years and then, when the influence that had shaped his faith was removed, walked away completely.

He was rescued as an infant by the priest Jehoiada and hidden in the house of the Lord for six years while the murderous Queen Athaliah reigned. When he was seven, he was crowned king of Judah under Jehoiada's care. He restored the temple. He led the people in reforms. He “did what was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest” (2 Chronicles 24:2). But Jehoiada died. And Joash, without the man whose faith had held up his own, listened instead to the princes of Judah. He abandoned the temple. He served idols. And when the Lord sent Jehoiada's own son Zechariah to warn him, Joash — the boy Jehoiada had rescued and raised — commanded Zechariah to be stoned to death in the very court of the temple Joash had once helped to restore.

“The LORD look on it, and repay!” (2 Chronicles 24:22).

Joash's faith had been real, or as real as a borrowed faith can be. It had been Jehoiada's faith more than his own. When Jehoiada was gone, the borrowed frame collapsed, and what emerged was a man who could murder the son of his own rescuer without visible shame. The warning here is uncomfortably close to home for anyone whose faith has leaned heavily on the presence of a particular pastor, mentor, or spouse: build your own connection to the vine. A branch that draws only through another branch will not survive that branch's absence.

PERSON BOX

Judas Iscariot, and the Difference Between Two Kinds of Sorrow

Judas is the hardest of these six to write about, and I want to be careful with him. Scripture does record real anguish. Matthew tells us that when Judas saw that Christ had been condemned, he “was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood’” (Matthew 27:3–4). That is not the calm, hardened departure of a Demas. There is torment there.

But Scripture itself gives us the distinction that unlocks his story, and it is a distinction every honest believer must learn to make in their own life. The word Matthew uses for Judas's remorse is *metamelētheis* — a word meaning regretted his feelings, was sorry. It is not the fuller New Testament word *metanoō*, which is the word for the repentance that changes direction and turns back — a full about-face. Paul draws the line between them with surgical precision:

“Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Godly sorrow drives a person back to God for mercy. Worldly sorrow drives a person deeper into despair, and often into self-destruction. Judas's anguish went the second way. He returned the money — but not returned to Christ. He confessed his sin — but to the chief priests, not to the One he had betrayed. He was overwhelmed by what he had done, but he did not throw himself at the feet of the Master who was, at that very hour, praying “Father, forgive them” from a cross. The thief on the cross did exactly that. Judas did not.

◆ Contrast his sorrow with David's after the terrible affair with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah: "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight" (Psalm 51:4). David's sin was, in visible terms, worse than Judas's — adultery compounded by murder. But David ran toward God with his sorrow. He named his sin to God. He begged for a clean heart. He knew that whatever men might do to him, the wound was ultimately against God, and only God could heal it. David returned. Apparently, Judas did not. ◆

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself pronounced the heaviest words spoken over any human being in Scripture concerning Judas: "woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matthew 26:24). And Acts 1:25 says Judas "by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." His own place. Scripture's quiet, dignified way of saying his end was, in the end, of his own choosing.

Judas is included here not to close the door on the mystery of his final state — that is between him and his Creator — but as a mirror in which each of us can examine the character of our own sorrow when we sin. Is our anguish driving us back to God, or deeper into shame? Are we running toward His feet, or away from His face? The right kind of sorrow is not a matter of intensity. It is a matter of direction. Judas's tears did not point him toward his Lord and Master who was still, at that very hour, willing to forgive him. ◆

PERSON BOX

Demas, Who Loved the Present World

Demas is named in Paul's letters as one of the co-labourers. In Colossians and Philemon he stands alongside Luke, Mark, Aristarchus — the trusted men of the apostolic circle. He had been in ministry with Paul, presumably for years. He had seen the miracles. He had heard the letters read aloud before they were sealed and sent. He was known to the churches. He was inside.

And Paul's final letter to Timothy, written from prison as the apostle was preparing for execution, contains this quiet sentence that has echoed down the centuries:

“For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica” (2 Timothy 4:10).

That is all. No public scandal is named. No explicit heresy. No moral collapse we are told about in detail. Just this: he loved this present world, and he left. The love of the world had, over time, quietly outweighed the love of the Master. And in the end Demas made the calculation. The comfort, the safety, the ease, the acceptance of Thessalonica were, to his eye, a better exchange than continued fellowship with an imprisoned apostle who was about to die.

Demas's warning is directed at every believer whose faith has never been dramatically tested but is being slowly eroded by comfort. The love of the world is rarely a single moment of decision. It is usually a hundred small preferences, accumulated over years, until the day finally comes when the believer no longer wants what the vine offers as much as they want what the world does. That day, when it comes, does not usually feel like apostasy. It feels like reasonable choice. That is what makes it so dangerous.

PERSON BOX

Hymenaeus, Who Suffered Shipwreck Concerning the Faith

Hymenaeus is named twice by Paul, in letters written years apart. In the first letter Paul had already delivered him to Satan “that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Timothy 1:20). In the second — years later — Hymenaeus is still teaching, and his teaching is spreading like cancer, corrupting the faith of others. Specifically, he was teaching that “the resurrection is already past” — a doctrinal departure that hollowed out the hope of the church.

Paul's language about him is stark. Their teaching “will spread like cancer” (2 Timothy 2:17). They “have strayed concerning the truth” and “overthrow the faith of some” (v. 18). The word “shipwreck” Paul uses for Hymenaeus's departure is the same word used for a boat that has broken up on the rocks — not damaged, not delayed, but destroyed. A shipwreck is not a stumble. It is the end of the voyage as an intact vessel.

Hymenaeus reminds us that departure from the vine sometimes does not look like a moral collapse or a return to the world's pleasures. Sometimes it looks like a subtle, persistent teaching that hollows out the true clear doctrines of scripture, which includes the resurrection, faith towards God, baptisms, repentance from dead works, laying on of hands, tithing, the return of the Lord Jesus, the reality of judgement, the fear of God and many more — until nothing recognisable as Christian faith is left. And once that damage begins to spread through others, Scripture treats it with a seriousness that ought to make every teacher tremble.

When the Vine Refuses to Let Go

Six branches walked away. We named them plainly. Their pattern of departure Scripture writes down without softening. But we would misrepresent the vine entirely if we walked out of the last section without meeting the other six the same Scripture also names — the ones the same vine, in the same Book, refused to let go of, refused to cut off.

Scripture is as clear about the mercy as it is about the warnings. The God who watched Saul harden himself is the same God who received Manasseh back after fifty-five years of the worst reign in Judah's history. The God who saw Solomon build high places is the same God who spared Nineveh when a whole city turned at a foreign prophet's forty-day warning. The God who let Judas walk into the night with the silver in his hand is the same God who found Peter three days later on the shore and restored him with a triple restoration for a triple denial. The vine that removes the branch that has stopped drawing sap altogether is the same vine that will not, under any circumstance, let go of a branch that turns back — however late, however broken, however unlikely the return may look.

Read these six alongside the six who walked away. They are Scripture's own balance to the warnings we have just walked through. They are the reason this book has been called *A Bruised Reed* and *A Smoking Flax*.

PERSON BOX

Manasseh, the Worst King Received Back

If any man in Scripture had earned final judgement by his own record, it was Manasseh. There were a total of twenty kings who reigned over Judah in the roughly 345 years between Rehoboam and Zedekiah, before the Babylonian exile. Only a handful were said to have done “right in the sight of the LORD,” and fewer still earned the added commendation of walking as their father David had walked. King Manasseh reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-five years, longer than any king in Judah's history, even those few that God said did right in His sight. And in that half-century he undid, brick by brick, every reform his righteous father Hezekiah had built. He rebuilt the high places his father had torn down. He raised altars to Baal inside the very temple God had chosen to place His name in. He passed his own sons through fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom. He practised sorcery. He consulted mediums. He shed innocent blood in Jerusalem “from one end to another” (2 Kings 21:16). The prophets warned him. The word of the Lord came against him. He did not listen.

The verdict against him is one of the heaviest in the Old Testament: “Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel” (2 Kings 21:9). More evil than the Canaanites. More evil than the Amorites. The worst king in Judah's history, in language Scripture does not soften.

And yet — and this is why he is here in this list and not the previous one — 2 Chronicles records what 2 Kings does not. After decades of that reign, Assyria came. They put a hook in Manasseh's nose. They bound him with bronze fetters. They carried him away to Babylon in chains. And there, in the affliction of a foreign prison, this is what happened:

◆ *“Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God” (2 Chronicles 33:12–13).* ◆

Read that slowly. He implored. He humbled himself. He prayed. And the God who had watched him fill Jerusalem with innocent blood received his entreaty. Not slowly. Not grudgingly. Not after imposing further punishment first to make the point. He received his entreaty, heard his supplication. Manasseh went home and, in the years remaining to him, tore down the very idols he had spent fifty-five years building.

If Manasseh could be received back, the door back has never been closed to any man reading these pages.

◆

PERSON BOX

Nineveh, a Wicked City Spared

Nineveh was a vast, brutal city — the capital of Assyria, an empire that would eventually destroy the northern kingdom of Israel and drag ten tribes into an exile they would not return from. The Lord Himself described Nineveh as “that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left” (Jonah 4:11). More than a hundred and twenty thousand infants alone; the whole city perhaps a million souls, most of them enemies of the covenant people of God.

To this city God sent Jonah with a single message of eight words in Hebrew — a message the reluctant prophet delivered as briefly as he could: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jonah 3:4). No condition was named. No offer of mercy was included. Just the pronouncement of doom.

And yet Scripture says the response that swept through the city was almost immediate. The people believed God. They proclaimed a fast. Even the king came down from his throne, laid aside his royal robes, sat in ashes, and issued the decree:

“Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?” (Jonah 3:9).

Who can tell. No presumption. No claim on mercy. Simply an honest turning at the warning of a foreign prophet, and a trembling hope that the God who had spoken would receive it. And He did. “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it” (Jonah 3:10). A hundred and twenty thousand infants alive at bedtime that same night, because a city turned.

◆ The Lord Jesus Himself would later hold Nineveh up as a witness against His own generation: “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here” (Matthew 12:41). Nineveh becomes, in the mouth of the Lord Himself, an example of how a heart that hears warning and turns is a heart the vine will not throw away — even a heart from outside the covenant, even a whole city of them at once. ◆

PERSON BOX

David, After Bathsheba

David's sin was not private. He committed adultery with the wife of one of his most loyal officers. He tried to cover it by summoning Uriah home from the front, hoping he would sleep with his wife and provide plausible cover for the pregnancy. When Uriah, in his soldier's honour, refused to enjoy comforts his fellow soldiers were denied at the front, David sent him back with a sealed letter to Joab arranging his own murder. The general staged the death. The whole royal court, in the years that followed, quietly understood what had happened.

Then the prophet Nathan came. He told a parable of a rich man who had taken a poor man's only ewe lamb. David erupted in righteous anger against the fictional rich man. Nathan looked at him and said the four words that ended a year of hidden guilt: "You are the man" (2 Samuel 12:7).

David did not deny it. He did not deflect it. He did not fire the prophet. He said, immediately and without excuse: "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13). And from that broken confession came Psalm 51, one of the most cherished prayers in the Hebrew Bible:

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:1, 10–11).

David faced real consequences. The sword did not depart from his house. He buried the child born of the sin. He watched his own sons repeat, in their generation, the disorder his sin had introduced. But he was restored to fellowship with the Lord immediately. He remained the anointed king. He continued to walk with God. And when he died decades later, Scripture called him “a man after God's own heart” — not because he had never sinned, but because when he sinned, he ran toward God, not away.

David is Scripture's clearest example of a great sin met by a great repentance and received by an even greater mercy.

PERSON BOX

Peter, After the Denial

Peter had promised, hours before, that even if all the others fell away, he would not. He had drawn a sword in the garden. He had followed the arresting party at a distance when the others fled. And then, in the courtyard of the high priest, warmed by a charcoal fire while his Lord was being tried inside, he denied three times that he had ever known the man.

The third denial was cursed and bitter. And in the very moment he was cursing, the rooster crowed. The Lord, being led between guards, turned and looked at him. Peter went out and wept bitterly.

For the next three days, so far as we can tell, Peter carried the weight of that failure alone. He was not present at the crucifixion. His name is absent from the accounts of the burial. He may have been the one man in Jerusalem who most needed to be found on the morning after the resurrection.

He was.

On the shore of Galilee, after the resurrection, the Lord Jesus kindled another charcoal fire — the same word John uses in both scenes, deliberately. Around that fire He asked Peter one question, three times, matching the number of the denial: “do you love Me?” Three questions. Three answers. Three commissions: “Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep. Feed My sheep.” Peter did not merely return. He was restored to the very ministry the denial had seemed to disqualify him from. Fifty days later, he preached the sermon that added three thousand souls to the church at Pentecost.

Peter's story is the answer to every believer who fears their failure has ended their usefulness to the Lord. The Lord did not merely receive Peter back. He rebuilt him with a triple restoration matching a triple denial, and He did it publicly in front of the other disciples so that no one would ever doubt that Peter's calling still stood.

PERSON BOX

The Prodigal Son

This one is not a historical figure. It is the parable Christ Himself told, in a chapter that contains three parables of things lost and found. It is here because the Lord Jesus went to the trouble of composing it, telling it, and preserving it in the gospel record so that no generation of the church would ever forget how the Father receives a returning son.

The younger son demanded his inheritance while his father still lived — the ancient near-eastern equivalent of wishing his father dead. He took the money, travelled to a far country, and wasted every coin on prodigal living. When a famine came, he found himself feeding pigs — for a Jewish boy, the deepest degradation imaginable — and “no one gave him anything” (Luke 15:16). Even the pig-food was denied him.

There in the pig pen, hungry, filthy, alone, he came to himself. He rehearsed a speech. He would go home. He would say he had sinned against heaven and before his father. He would ask to be made one of the hired servants. He would not presume to be received back as a son.

He never finished the speech.

“But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

While he was still a great way off. Which means the father had been watching the road. Not once. Not occasionally. Every day, for however long the son had been gone. The father was looking. The father saw him. The father ran — a scandalous thing for an eastern patriarch to do in public. The father fell on his neck. The father kissed him. And before the son could finish his rehearsed speech, the father was calling for the best robe, the ring, sandals for his feet, and the fatted calf.

◆ If any parable puts to rest the fear that a returning heart might be rejected, it is this one. The father was watching. He is still watching. He has never stopped. This story is given more context in the book *The One Qualified To Throw A Stone Didn't*, in the section “Love that reaches, restores, and refuses to weaponize.” Download FREE at oludareakinbo.com ◆

PERSON BOX

The Thief on the Cross

He is the last figure named in this list, deliberately, because he is the shortest testimony of them all. Scripture tells us almost nothing about him except how he ended. He was a criminal — one of two crucified alongside the Lord Jesus Christ that Friday afternoon. Both men initially reviled Christ (Matthew 27:44). But at some point in the hours the two thieves hung there dying, one of them saw something in the man in the middle that changed him.

The other thief, still hardening, mocked to the end: “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us” (Luke 23:39). The dying man on the other side rebuked him: “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:40–41). And then, in the shortest confession in the New Testament, he turned his head toward the Lord and said the words that have echoed through every deathbed in Christian history since:

“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

The response was immediate. “Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). No baptism. No years of discipleship. No accumulated works. No opportunity to make anything right in this life. Just a heart that turned, at the very last, toward the Lord who was, at that very moment, dying for exactly this kind of eleventh-hour turning.

The thief on the cross is Scripture's final word to every believer who has drifted for years and fears they have waited too long. There is no such thing as too late while breath remains.

Six who walked away. Six the vine refused to let go of. Together they form the honest picture Scripture teaches:

the vine does not force the branch that has deliberately let go, and the vine does not release the branch that is turning back. Both truths belong to the same character of God. Both are woven through the same Scripture. Neither one can be understood apart from the other.

The believer who reads only the first six will fall into a fear that Scripture never intended. The believer who reads only the second six will fall into a presumption Scripture explicitly warns against. But the believer who reads both — who sees the vine hold with unbreakable grip the branch that draws sap, and reach out to receive the branch that turns back, and finally release only the branch that has definitively stopped abiding — that believer has seen the vine as it truly is.

What Falling Away Is Not

Six examples. All of them serious. All of them ending in departure Scripture describes without softening. But now the pastoral question that some readers will already be asking with rising fear: Am I one of them? Have I fallen away because I stumbled last Tuesday? Because I lost my temper this morning? Because my prayer life has been thin for a month?

No. And Scripture is unmistakably clear that No is the right answer.

Falling away, in the sense Scripture warns of, is not the same as stumbling. It is not the same as a difficult season. It is not the same as doubt that visits a believer during a valley of grief. It is not the same as a besetting sin the believer hates and confesses and returns from again. It is not the same as failure. It is not the same as the ache of feeling far from God in a wilderness that will eventually end.

Consider Peter. Peter denied the Lord three times, with cursing, in a courtyard, the very night he had sworn he would die for Him. That was not a small failure. It was a public, repeated, cowardly denial at the moment of the Lord's greatest need. And yet Peter is not in the list above. Why? Because when he stumbled, he wept bitterly (Luke 22:62), and when the Lord found him again on the shore of Galilee, Peter was ready to be restored. Three times denied; three times restored (John 21:15–17). Peter stumbled. He did not depart.

Now compare that to Judas. Judas also broke. Judas also felt the weight of what he had done. But Judas ran the other way. His sorrow did not carry him to his Lord's feet. It carried him to the temple treasury, then to a field, then to a rope. The two men had the same terrible night; they responded in two entirely different ways.

The difference between a stumble and a departure is not the size of the sin. It is the direction of the heart afterward. A stumbling, still-abiding believer runs, however slowly and shamefully, back toward the vine. A departing branch turns, deliberately, and walks away.

If you are reading this with fear rising in your chest, ask yourself the question honestly: when I sin, do I run toward God in confession, or further away from Him in shame? If, however weakly, your heart still turns toward Him — however imperfectly, however slowly — you are Peter, not Judas. Peter stumbled and returned. So can you. So do most of us, more often than we would like to admit.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The warnings in this book are for the branch that has quietly, deliberately let go — not for the one still, however imperfectly, holding on.

The Posture of the Believer

If a permanent, unshakeable, no-matter-what eternal security were the truth Scripture teaches, we would expect to find its greatest witnesses walking through life with a settled confidence about their own status. We would expect Paul, in particular, to speak of his salvation as a certificate framed on the wall of his heart, an accomplished fact that required nothing further of him.

We find the opposite.

Listen to Paul, describing his own wrestling with sin — not as a settled man resting on an unshakeable status, but as a man in genuine anguish:

“ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

— Romans 7:18–19, 24 NKJV

Sit with that cry. This is not a man breezily confident that his standing before God is untouchable no matter what he does with his flesh. This is a man torn, groaning, pleading for deliverance. If Paul had genuinely believed his salvation had been permanently secured the moment he first believed, immune to anything that followed, this kind of anguish would make very little sense. You do not cry “O wretched

man that I am!” over a status you already know cannot be shaken by your own conduct. He cries out precisely because the battle with the flesh is real, ongoing, and not yet finished.

And notice where his answer lands. Not in a doctrine. Not in a memory of a past decision. In a Person: “I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25).

His confidence was not a signed certificate filed away from the past. It was an ongoing, present dependence on Christ.

Elsewhere Paul writes of his own ministry with striking honesty: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Lest I myself should become disqualified. Paul — apostle, church-planter, martyr-to-be — did not consider himself exempt from the possibility. He disciplined himself precisely because he took the danger seriously. If any believer in history had a right to the presumption that his status was untouchable, it would have been the man who had been caught up to the third heaven. He does not presume. He watches.

David modelled the same posture centuries earlier:

“ If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.

— Psalm 130:3–4 NKJV

David was not strutting about, confident that his sin carried no weight simply because he was God's anointed. He was undone by how quickly any of us would be swept away if God kept a strict account. His hope was not in his own resilience — it was in God's mercy, sought again, and again, and again.

This is the posture of the believer as Scripture models it: neither the anxious performance of the legalist nor the presumptuous confidence of the once-saved-always-saved slogan. It is the daily wrestling, the daily confession, the daily receiving of mercy from a God whose covenant is faithful and whose grip is unbreakable — but who has never invited His people to test how far they can lean away from Him while still calling Him Lord.

What About “The Gifts and the Calling

of God Are Irrevocable”?

Some readers point to Paul's words that “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29) as proof that salvation, once given, can never be lost under any circumstance. It is a good verse. It is a true verse. But read it in its actual setting.

Paul is not discussing the eternal security of any one individual believer's ongoing life choices in Romans 11. He is defending God's continued covenant faithfulness to Israel as a people, despite Israel's national unbelief (Romans 11:1–2, 25–29). It is a statement about God's unwavering character and His long covenant purposes across the story of redemption — not a blanket guarantee that any individual's wilful, unrepentant rejection of Christ somehow carries no consequence.

In fact, the very same chapter contains Paul's clearest warning against presuming on grace:

“Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Romans 11:20–22).

The apostle who taught that God's gifts are irrevocable is the same apostle who, in the same chapter, warns Gentile

believers that they can be cut off if they do not continue. Paul was not confused. He was holding, together, the two truths that any faithful reader of Scripture must hold together: God's covenant faithfulness is unshakeable, and the individual branch is called to continue.

What About “If We Are Faithless,

He Remains Faithful”?

Others lean on Paul's words to Timothy that “if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13), reading it as proof that God will keep you saved no matter what you do. But look one verse earlier, in the very same breath:

“ *If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*

— 2 Timothy 2:11–13 NKJV

Paul is not contradicting himself in the space of three sentences. He is saying God's character never changes — He is faithful to His word, in blessing and in warning alike. The warning of verse 12 (“If we deny Him, He also will deny us”) is every bit as much a part of His unchanging faithfulness as the promise of verse 13.

You cannot lift one sentence and quietly leave the other behind. They were written to be read together. God's faithfulness is not the same thing as God's obligation to override the choices of the human heart. He remains true to His own word, which includes both the promise to those who endure and the warning to those who deny.

Patient Continuance in Doing Good

Here is a passage that quietly settles the question for anyone willing to read it slowly. Paul, writing to the Romans, describes what God will render to each person on the day of judgement:

“...who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honour, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath.

— Romans 2:6–8 NKJV

Read that carefully. Paul says eternal life is granted “to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honour, and immortality.”

Patient continuance. The very phrase presumes the possibility of not continuing. If continuance were automatic and unbreakable the moment a person first believed, the phrase would be meaningless. Paul would not have chosen it. He chose it because Scripture does not teach a security that operates independently of the believer's ongoing walk. It teaches a security that expresses itself through patient continuance.

This is not works-salvation. Paul is not saying that we earn eternal life by accumulating good deeds. He is saying, as he says everywhere else in his letters, that the fruit of genuine

faith is a life that keeps walking, keeps doing good, keeps seeking glory and honour and immortality from God. The patient continuance is not currency. It is evidence. It is the natural fruit of a branch still connected to the vine. But it is real, it is required, and Paul places it here, in the plainest of terms, as the pattern of those to whom eternal life is finally rendered.

Contrast that with those who are “self-seeking and do not obey the truth.” They receive indignation and wrath. Not because God is temperamental, but because their lives — their whole direction — betrayed a heart that had turned away from Him.

The verse is a mirror. Which is my life pointed toward? Am I patiently continuing in doing good, however imperfectly, however slowly, however often I stumble and get up again? Or have I, quietly, over months and years, become self-seeking, resistant to the truth, obeying unrighteousness? The direction is what matters. Not perfection. Direction.

The Nature Lesson Underneath It All

Go back to that grafted mango tree. A strong wind does not uproot a well-grafted branch. It bends. It sways. It may even lose a few leaves. But the graft holds, because the connection to the sap was never actually broken. That is the man who stumbles and returns. That is Peter after the courtyard. That is David after Bathsheba. That is every honest believer who has ever failed on a Wednesday and been restored by a Saturday.

But a branch that has been slowly, deliberately twisted away from the trunk over months — worked loose a little at a time by the very hand that is supposed to be holding it steady — eventually falls off on its own, storm or no storm. Nobody has to come and cut it. It simply stops receiving what kept it alive.

God is not standing over believers with shears, looking for an excuse. He is, if anything, remarkably patient — Paul says exactly that in the same breath he warns about being cut off (Romans 11:22, “the goodness and severity of God”). But patience is not the same as pretending the connection does not matter.

The vinedresser prunes so that the fruitful branch may bear more fruit (John 15:2). He does not cut off the fruitful. He does not cut off the stumbling. He does not cut off the wounded. He removes only the branch that, over a season of its own choosing, has stopped drawing sap altogether — a branch that has, in every meaningful sense, already left the vine.

A Quiet Word to Anyone Returning

If you are reading this having quietly drifted — perhaps for years — and you find yourself still troubled enough to be reading these pages, I want to say this to you plainly and gently.

The very fact that you are reading is itself a mercy. The vinedresser has not given up on you. The Spirit that once witnessed with your spirit that you were a child of God is the same Spirit still able to stir a hunger in you that no amount of drifting has entirely quenched. If you were fully departed, this book would bore you. It does not bore you. You are still reading. That, in itself, is grace at work.

The door back is not locked. The father of the prodigal, in the parable the Lord Himself told, was watching the road for his wandering son so persistently that he saw him “when he was still a great way off” (Luke 15:20). The son had rehearsed a speech about becoming a hired servant. The father did not let him finish. He ran to him. He clothed him. He killed the fatted calf. The son had gone into the far country and lived like a stranger to his own family. The father had never once stopped watching the road.

If you turn back today — even if slowly, even if with fear, even if you are not sure what to say when you first speak to Him again — He is watching. He will run to meet you. Whatever the length of your drifting, the vine is still there. The sap is still flowing. Take the first step. The rest of the story is His to write.

Ten Questions for Quiet Reflection

Sit with these ten questions before turning to the closing. They are for the believer who has walked long, and they are for the believer who has drifted. Take them slowly. Some of them will sit on you. That is part of their work.

1

When I sin, is my pattern to run toward God in confession, or further away from Him in shame?

2

Am I still hearing the Shepherd's voice regularly — through His Word — or has it gone quiet because I have stopped listening?

3

Is there an area of my life I have stopped calling sin, simply because I have grown tired of resisting it?

4

Do I still desire to abide in Christ, even on the days I fail to?

5

Have I mistaken a season of stumbling for a settled decision to walk away — or vice versa?

6

Who in my life would honestly tell me if they saw me quietly detaching from the vine?

7

Am I holding onto grace as a living relationship, or have I flattened it into a one-time transaction I never think about again?

8

What wind or pressure in my life right now is testing whether my graft truly took?

9

Is my fear of losing salvation driving me to anxious performance, or to genuine, restful abiding?

10

If I am honest, is the direction of my life over the last year toward Christ, or gradually, quietly, away from Him?

Comfort for the Anxious Believer

None of this should produce anxious believers, constantly checking whether they have “lost salvation” every time they lose their temper in traffic, or fall short of righteous living in some way. That is not the fruit of this teaching — that is a misuse of it. The same Scripture that warns of falling away also says there is no condemnation for those walking after the Spirit (Romans 8:1), and that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:9). A stumbling, repentant, still-abiding believer has nothing to fear from any of the verses in this book. They were written for the branch that has quietly, deliberately let go — not for the one still, however imperfectly, holding on.

Christ Himself gave the clearest summary of the whole matter, when His disciples asked what the last days would be like:

“*And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.*

— Matthew 24:12–13 NKJV

Not he who merely began. He who endures. The Kingdom that is coming was never promised to those who simply started the race — it belongs to those still running when the King arrives.

Final Word

The vine does not let go easily.

It holds branches through storms, through droughts, through seasons that look, from the outside, like the whole tree might be dying. The same vine that carried Saul through years of jealousy, that carried Solomon through years of drifting, that carried Joash through the death of his rescuer, that carried Judas through three years of walking with the Lord Himself, that carried Demas through months of ministry with Paul, that carried Hymenaeus through his teaching career — that same vine is still holding the branches that are drawing sap tonight.

The same vine that welcomed Peter back after the courtyard, and David back after Bathsheba, and the prodigal back after the pig pens, and the thief back at the very last hour on the cross beside the Lord — that same vine is still open tonight to any branch turning back toward the root.

The same vine that has held the persecuted saints across every century of the church, that has held the widow who kept praying through decades of loss, that has held the martyr through the fire, that has held the ordinary believer through Monday-through-Friday ordinariness — that same vine is holding you, tonight, if you are still drawing from it.

The vine does not force a branch to stay. It was never designed to hold a branch against that branch's own repeated, deliberate choosing. Security in Christ is real — profoundly, gloriously real for every branch still drawing from the root. But it was never meant to be security from Christ, held at arm's length, tested to its limits, and taken for granted.

Stay grafted in. The sap is still flowing. The vinedresser is still faithful. The Kingdom He is preparing is worth every season it takes to bear fruit for it.

And whether you are a branch that has stood firm for fifty years, or one that stumbled last Tuesday, or one that has been quietly drifting for a decade and only tonight has felt the pull to return — the invitation is the same. The vine is still there. The sap is still flowing.

Come home. Stay. Abide.

“ He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

— Revelation 21:7 NKJV